



29 April 2014 - In warfare, few weapons are as vicious, indiscriminate and debilitating as chemical warfare agents. After the devastation of Mustard gas during the First World War, the international community has sought to ban the use of chemical agents in warfare. But chemical weapons have been used on several occasions after that, from the Halabaja attack in Iraq to Sarin gas in Tokyo – or the more recent use of chemical weapons in Syria. Chemical weapons still pose a serious threat to humanity – and especially to the civilian population.

Chemical weapons by their very nature are volatile and disperse rapidly. They exist in liquid, gas and solid forms and can be disseminated through many mediums including missiles and grenades. Chemical agents can be either temporarily incapacitating or deadly. Some, such as pepper spray and tear gas, are employed by law enforcement agencies around the world for their non-lethal and debilitating properties. Other forms such as nerve gas – often derivatives of mustard gas - are strictly outlawed by the international community due to their highly volatile and uncontrollable impact on populations in targeted zones. Chemical agents are classified as weapons of mass destruction along with biological, nuclear and radiological weapons.

Today is a day of commemoration and we observe the Day of Remembrance for all victims of Chemical Warfare. However, a shadow is cast over this year's commemoration as the use of chemical agents is no longer relegated to past atrocities, but is a part of our present. Just last year, chemical weapons were used by the Syrian Arab Republic, with gruesome results. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemns these actions stating, "The use of chemical

weapons in Syria was a deplorable offense against humanity.

Protocols by the international community were created in 1925 to ensure that any use of chemical weapons under any circumstances would be a grave violation of the customary international law. And reinforced in 1997 with the Chemical Weapons Convention. However, six countries remain outside the Convention today: Angola, Egypt, Israel, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar and South Sudan.

In [his statement](#) on this day the Secretary-General calls for the states outside the 1997 convention to ratify it as soon as possible. The SG applauds [the eradication](#) of 90 per cent of Syria's chemical weapons, which have now been either removed or destroyed, as a result of the collective action of the international community. However, he also underlines that, "We must not relax our vigilance. We must do our utmost to deter any future incidents. "

UNRIC related links:

UNRIC's newsletter on [the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons](#)

UNRIC's article on [the destruction of chemical weapons](#)