

Baroness Goldie addresses 24th Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference

The 24th Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference, hosted by the Ministry of Defence and Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), has concluded today.

Bringing together representatives from governments across the world, the annual conference enables crucial conversations on the demilitarisation of chemical weapons.

99% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles have been destroyed and the conference brings together global experts to discuss progress, share experiences and lessons, and to co-operate in eradicating existing chemical weapons and addressing outstanding challenges.

Delivering the keynote speech of the conference, Baroness Goldie condemned Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, recognising the continued threats around the use and retention of chemical weapons, and the need to hold those responsible to account.

Defence Minister, Baroness Goldie, said:

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is right to acknowledge the major achievements in that time. However, as recent events have shown, the threat of chemical weapons remains very real, and we must not become complacent.

As we embark on the next 25 years of the Chemical Weapons Convention, we must continue with energy and passion to work together to do all we can to uphold it.

On the progress being made with the Chemistry and Technology Centre and the work of Conference Ambassador and Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fernando Arias, Baroness Goldie added:

The work being led so resolutely by the Director General is nothing short of impressive. From the Verification Regime to the Global Partnership Agenda, we must be proud of these collective achievements.

I am equally pleased with the progress of the Chemistry and Technology Centre, which will enhance the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' technical and scientific capacity

and improve facilities for training; the UK has contributed almost £900k to the construction of the Centre and remains willing to provide expert technical support.

A wide range of topics were covered, with sessions focused on emerging risks and potential solutions to combat chemical weapon threats, as well as new disposal systems and neutralisation methods.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Director General, Fernando Arias said:

Current global events underscore that preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons is an agenda that will always remain open after the end of the period of destruction.

For the sake of future generations, it is our responsibility to build on the gains already accomplished under the resilient multilateral framework of the Chemical Weapons Convention. And in the interest of humankind, it is our further responsibility to strengthen the ban that has proven so robust for so long.

The Minister also acknowledged and applauded the crucial work of scientific, technical and policy experts that strive to make the world safe from chemical weapons.

As joint hosts of the conference, Dstl plays a lead role in support of global demilitarisation and has an ongoing programme disposing of current and historic chemical weapons.

Dstl Chief Executive, Paul Hollinshead said:

Over the years with combined international efforts and investment in science and technology we have provided the solutions to allow the safe destruction of stockpiles. I'm immensely proud of the role of our world-class experts in Dstl, the Ministry of Defence, and our international partners are playing to create a safer future free from chemical weapons.

The Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force in 1997, banning chemical weapons, and requiring states parties to destroy any existing stockpiles. In 1998 the first Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation conference was held, and this has continued to be hosted annually by the MOD and Dstl.

The Convention requires global cooperation to affect lasting change, as highlighted by chemical weapon attacks including in Russia on Mr. Alexey Navalny in 2020, in Salisbury in the UK in 2018, and the numerous chemical weapon attacks by the Assad regime in Syria.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs, the Honourable Ms. Deborah Rosenblum said:

I congratulate the conference organizers and participants for coming together at such a critical time globally. The threats posed by chemical weapons continue to grow and the norms against use continue to atrophy. We must come together to reverse this trend.