

From chemical to nuclear

Time for another convention

Tony Simpson

How did the world come to agree a Chemical Weapons Convention, and shouldn't we now proceed to a Nuclear Weapons Convention? The Russell Foundation made its contribution to the former, and strongly supports the latter.

In 1982, the Russell Appeal against Chemical Weapons was launched with the support of more than 1,500 medical, biological and chemical scientists in Britain. It warned of the 'increasing danger of an escalating arms race in nerve gas and other chemical weapons between NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, obscured by the current expansion of nuclear arsenals'. The Appeal specifically urged:

- a Withdrawal of the reservation of the right to retaliate in kind made by Britain when ratifying the 1925 Geneva Protocol [for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and Bacteriological Methods of Warfare].
- b Re-submission of the draft Chemical Convention tabled by Britain in 1976, revised to incorporate new proposals on verification, consultation, scope and confidence-building measures.
- c The opening of specific negotiations on the withdrawal of chemical weapons from both sides of Europe.

Ten years later, in September 1992, having overcome a number of obstacles, the UN Conference on Disarmament adopted the draft text of the Chemical Weapons Convention and transmitted it to the UN General Assembly. In December of that year, the text was commended by the General Assembly, with the request to the UN Secretary-General, as Depositary of the

Convention, that it be opened for signature in Paris on 13 January 1993. 130 States signed the Convention within the first two days, and it was subsequently deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General in New York. Currently, 189 states are members of the Convention; Syria is joining, which will make it 190. Israel and Myanmar are signatory states which have not ratified the Convention. Angola, Egypt, North Korea, and South Sudan have neither signed nor acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Convention gave birth to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which came into existence in April 1997. Its deed of foundation – the Convention itself – aims to achieve four principal objectives: the elimination of chemical weapons and of the capacity to develop them; the verification of non-proliferation; international assistance and protection in the event of use or threat of use of chemical weapons; and international co-operation and assistance in the peaceful use of chemistry.

In May 1997, José Bustani, was elected by acclamation as the first Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In May 2000, his mandate was extended for a second four-year term of office by unanimous decision of the Conference of the States Parties. Mr Bustani, a distinguished Brazilian diplomat, relished the opportunity ‘to contribute to the first ever *truly* global attempt to abolish an entire category of weapons of mass destruction’. He added, ‘the Chemical Weapons Convention represents the international community’s biggest ever achievement in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation’ (see *Spokesman* 75).

Following the harrowing events of 9/11, in 2001, things changed radically. At the time, Director-General Bustani was working hard to bring Iraq within the Chemical Weapons Convention. During the 1980s, Iraq had used chemical weapons against Iran, with considerable assistance from the West, particularly on manufacture and targeting. Extending the Convention’s remit to Iraq was a high priority for the Organisation. But the Bush Administration wanted no such thing. Bustani and his Organisation couldn’t be permitted to verify Iraq’s dismantling of its chemical weapons programme. Thus, Director-General Bustani was forced out of office in a campaign orchestrated by the US.

On 21 April 2002, a special meeting was held in The Hague, where the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has its headquarters. Following tempestuous deliberations, Bustani’s removal was carried by 48 votes to six, with 43 abstentions. This is thought to be

the first time in history that the head of a major international organisation was removed during his or her term of office. Three months later, the head of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service told Prime Minister Blair that 'Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction', in the words of the notorious 'Downing Street Memo' (see *Spokesman 105*).

Ambassador Bustani complained about his treatment to the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal, which found on his behalf and duly set aside the dismissal decision, awarding him 'moral' as well as financial compensation. Ambassador Bustani donated this financial compensation to the international co-operation programmes of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. He continued his diplomatic career as Brazil's Ambassador to the United Kingdom and then to France.

The Organisation Ambassador Bustani helped to build is now tasked with disarming Syria's large chemical arsenal in extremely difficult circumstances as war continues to ravage the country. It has been awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize for 'its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons', in which he played his part. As the OPCW goes about its vital work, is it not time replicate this structure for nuclear weapons? Almost 70 years after the holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a nuclear weapons convention is long overdue.

'The horrific events of 11 September have placed in stark relief the new realities at the dawn of a new century. We have a joint responsibility to make sure that chemical weapons are never allowed to fall into the wrong hands, or to pose a serious risk to present and future generations. Clearly, the best way to achieve this is to destroy the remaining stocks as quickly and safely as possible.'

José Bustani

Director-General

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

30 January 2002