

Switzerland is actively participating in the Global Partnership against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

Switzerland signed up to the "Global Partnership" in May 2003, which was founded by the member states of G8 in June 2002 with the aim of preventing terrorists or those who harbour them from gaining access to weapons of mass destruction. Its member states declared their intention to provide up to 20 billion US dollars over a period of ten years for the purpose of achieving disarmament and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The funds are to be primarily deployed for projects in the Russian Federation. The member states also called on other countries to participate in the Global Partnership, the priorities of which are as follows: to support disarmament of chemical weapons, to safely dispose of the decommissioned nuclear submarines and fissile material, and to find civilian employment for those scientists who possess know-how in the area of weapons of mass destruction.

As a member of the Global Partnership, Switzerland will be able to co-ordinate its efforts to support chemical weapons disarmament in Russia even more efficiently with other donor countries. It will also be able to benefit from better conditions for implementing its own projects, for example exemption from the recipient country's taxes, and regulations governing third-party liability claims. Switzerland's involvement in the "Global Partnership" does not give rise to any financial commitments in addition to the funds already approved by Parliament for supporting chemical weapons disarmament throughout the world. Its participation takes the form of a legally non-binding declaration of intent, and Switzerland is at liberty to define its own specific procedures for each stated objective.

Chemical weapons stockpiles in Russia

The majority of the declared world-wide total of around 70,000 tonnes of chemical weapons are stockpiled within the sovereign territory of the Russian Federation. Here, some 40,000 tonnes are stored at seven sites, and with the exception of Shchuch'ye, all of these are situated in the European region, i.e. west of the Ural Mountains.

Blister agents

The Gorny and Kambarka sites contain approximately 7,500 tonnes of yperit (mustard gas) and lewisite, or mixtures thereof. These agents cause severe burns upon skin contact or inhalation. At the two above-mentioned sites they are stored in large tanks (50 cubic metres) and barrels, and are therefore not weaponised.



Photo: Jacques Baud/NASA

Useful links:

- Federal Department of Foreign Affairs:
www.eda.admin.ch
- Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports:
www.vbs-ddps.ch
- General Staff:
www.vbs-ddps.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home
- Spiez Laboratory:
www.labor-spiez.ch

Kisner is the only site at which a small quantity of ammunition is stored that has been armed with these agents.

Nerve gas

More than 32,000 tonnes of nerve gas are stored at Kisner and the other four depots (Shchuch'ye, Maradikova, Potsheb and Leonidova). Depending on the type of substance, nerve gases cause paralysis following inhalation or skin contact, and usually result in death. Stockpiles of nerve gas exist in Shchuch'ye and Kisner in the form of artillery ammunition, and in Maradikova, Leonidovka and Potsheb in the form of aircraft bombs and spray tanks.

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Switzerland's commitment to chemical weapons disarmament

Approximately 70,000 tonnes of declared chemical weapons are stockpiled throughout the world, most of which are leftovers from the Cold War era.

In 1993 the international community finalised the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) with the aim of destroying these stockpiles. Although a certain amount of progress has been made, fully implementing this convention is proving to be problematic, mainly because the Russian Federation – which possesses the largest stocks of chemical weapons – is finding it difficult to meet the stated deadline.

As a signatory state of the CWC, Switzerland is contributing around 17 million Swiss francs in support of projects aimed at destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons in Russia and certain other countries.

Furthermore, its involvement in the "Global Partnership" against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction reinforces its commitment in this area.

The signing of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by the international community in 1993 represented a breakthrough in the area of global disarmament. Since this is the only existing agreement that regulates the total destruction of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, ▶

"Through its strong commitment, Switzerland is actively contributing towards the realisation of a world without chemical weapons."
Micheline Calmy-Rey,
Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Definition of chemical weapons

In accordance with the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the term "chemical weapons" encompasses not only toxic substances, but also ammunition and material associated with their deployment. Chemical weapons belong to the same category as biological and nuclear weapons, i.e. they are classified as weapons of mass destruction that cause major damage or indiscriminately kill both civilians and members of armed forces.



Photo: CISP

Historical information

Although we can trace the use of chemical substances in armed conflicts right back to antiquity, 22 April 1915 is regarded as the date on which chemical weapons were first used in modern warfare on a large scale. On this date, Germany used gas in a battle near Ypres that led to the loss of 5,000 lives, while a further 10,000 people received severe burns.

The horrors of World War I and its consequences led to the signature of the Geneva Protocol in 1925 prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. However, it did not explicitly prohibit the production and storage of such weapons. Despite these efforts, research activities and the development of new toxic agents proceeded unabated during the period between the two world wars as well as in the Cold War era, and the resulting weapons were subsequently used in a variety of conflicts, e.g. in Africa (Italian invasion of Ethiopia), Asia (Vietnam and Korea) and the Middle East (conflict between Iran and Iraq).

Reactions by the international community

The 1st Gulf War underscored the dangers of uncontrolled proliferation of chemical weapons, and prompted the international community to introduce an effective legislative mechanism that would not only secure arms control, but would also lead to the definitive elimination of such weapons. These efforts culminated in the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, which subsequently came into effect in 1997

New threat

In recent years we have witnessed the development of a new threat, namely the procurement and use of toxic chemical substances – that are both easier and cheaper to produce than nuclear weapons – by non-state players. As a consequence, it is even more important that the relevant regulations are tightened, existing stocks are destroyed and the international community works more closely together to combat this threat.

► Switzerland considers it to be of great importance to international security.

The CWC

The CWC prohibits the development, production, possession, sale and use of chemical weapons. It stipulates that signatory states have to declare any existing stocks and destroy them under international supervision, and calls for all declared stocks to be destroyed by 2007 if possible, though by 2012 at the latest.

Supervision and verification

The signatories established an independent body – the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) – which is based in The Hague and is responsible for supervising and verifying the implementation of the convention. 152 countries have ratified the CWC since it came into effect in 1997. Five countries have declared that they possess chemical weapons, namely the USA, Russia, India,



OPCW headquarters in The Hague

Photo: OPCW

South Korea and Albania. Russia possesses the greatest quantity of chemical weapons, with a declared total of 40,000 tonnes (versus the global total of 70,000 tonnes).

Sluggish implementation of the CWC

To date, ten percent – approximately 7,000 tonnes – of the declared stocks of chemical weapons have been destroyed. Nonetheless, the process of chemical weapons disarmament is proceeding rather sluggishly. While the USA, India and South Korea are destroying their stockpiles more or less on schedule and the only recently declared stocks in Albania are relatively insignificant, this process has been delayed in the Russian Federation due to economic and financial problems. In view of this, various countries – and in particular the USA – have offered Russia additional support in the area of chemical weapons destruction. At the same time, the Russian government has intensified its efforts to comply with the CWC and has recently drawn up a more streamlined disarmament plan.

Switzerland's support for Russia

Switzerland firmly adheres to the principle that, as stipulated in the CWC, responsibility for disarmament lies with those countries that produced the chemical weapons. However, for reasons relating to security and environmental protection it is

also in Switzerland's own interest to share in the commitment on the part of the international community and support the destruction of chemical weapons in Russia and elsewhere.

Green Cross

The DFA's first step towards supporting Russia with its chemical weapons disarmament took the form of a financial contribution amounting to 3 million Swiss francs to the *Chemtrust* project initiated by Green Cross, a non-government organisation that sets out to eliminate weapons left over from the Cold War era. The purpose of *Chemtrust* is to launch campaigns aimed at promoting acceptance of chemical weapons disarmament by the general population and local administration.

Framework credit

In addition, the Federal Council responded to a motion put forward by a member of the Council of States in September 2002 by submitting a bill to Parliament calling for a framework credit of 17 million Swiss francs to support chemical weapons disarmament throughout the world. Financial support will be focused on projects primarily in Russia and where possible on those making a direct contribution to chemical weapons destruction. Since Russia's precise needs in this area have not been fully identified, Switzerland wants to keep a number of options open relating to support projects. In March 2003, Parliament unanimously approved the law that provides for this credit line.

"Global Partnership"

Switzerland is strengthening its commitment to chemical weapons disarmament by participating in the "Global Partnership" against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (cf. box). This opens up an opportunity for Switzerland to more efficiently co-ordinate its efforts to promote global chemical weapons disarmament with other donor nations.



Photo: Laboratory Spiez

Swiss expertise for the CWC

Switzerland is playing a significant role in the implementation of the CWC. It is providing OPCW inspectors with training in industry verification. The Spiez Laboratory - which is the federal government's research centre for atomic, biological and chemical threats - works closely together with the OPCW and is one of its twelve designated laboratories. On behalf of the OPCW, Switzerland also keeps sufficient stocks of protective and decontamination materials for 10,000 people, as well as detection devices, in the event that one of its member states should be attacked with chemical weapons. And leading experts from the General Staff at the Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports are providing foreign instructors with training in Switzerland in order to ensure that they know how to use these materials properly.



Photo: CISP