

## **EUCHEMS ON THE 100 YEARS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS - MEMORY AND RESPONSIBLE SCIENCE**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1915 in Ypres, Belgium, the first large-scale use of a chemical weapon took place. Even though chemical weapons had been around for many centuries, namely under the form of poisoned arrows, arsenic smoke or boiling tar, never its use caused such suffering and devastation as during World War I, where weapons such as chlorine gas or mustard gas would result in 90,000 deaths and over one million casualties.

*On this occasion, EuCheMS, the Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences, praises the prohibition and control of chemical weapons, but not less important, EuCheMS calls for the ethical mobilisation of all chemists, either in academia or industry, to nurture critical thought, to act ethically, and to properly inform non-chemists about both the potential virtues and dangers of chemistry. In short, EuCheMS calls for a responsible science.*

100 years have passed since this fatidic date and fortunately much have changed. In the domain of international law, many treaties and protocols have followed, culminating with the Chemical Weapons Convention entering into force in 1997. This convention is administrated by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and relies on the work of many chemists to analyse and control potential threats of chemical weapons and has recently won the Nobel Prize for Peace. In the domain of scientific research, many of the dangerous compounds used in chemical weapons have been investigated further to understand their impact on diseases such as cancer or Alzheimer.

History has constantly shown that as every science, chemistry is an open ended activity that can be used with either positive or negative intentions. This is indeed a common place, but one that we should not forget, as the very same molecule can either save or destroy depending on its utilisation.

As chemists and as citizens, let us not forget all the suffering still being caused by non-chemical weapons, let us learn from the example of chemistry that uses of science shall be limited by ethical considerations and be used for our common good. Collective memory is a crucial part of our identity, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1915 is a date that every chemist should know, as the symbol of a conduct that should not be repeated, as the opposite of what science should always be - *responsible science*.

*Attached: Ferruccio Trifirò: The duality of chemistry and the First World War*

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### *About EuCheMS*

EuCheMS, the European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences, aims to nurture a platform for scientific discussion and to provide a single, unbiased European voice on key policy issues in chemistry and related fields. Representing more than 160,000 chemists from more than 40 Member Societies and other chemistry related organisations, EuCheMS relies on a unique network of active researchers involved in all the fields of chemistry.

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