

PREFACE

This "accession kit" was prepared by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division in October 1993 in response to a decision by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their Limassol summit earlier that month, collectively encouraging members of the association to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, as quickly as possible in order to bring the Convention into force. Some 65 ratifications are required for the Convention to enter into force on 13 January 1995, and there is clear scope for the Commonwealth to be able to make a very significant contribution to the international effort to rid the world of the scourge of chemical weapons by enacting the necessary legislation.

As United Nations Secretary-General H E Boutros Boutros-Ghali remarked last year, "there are today some 20 states that possess or seek to acquire a chemical weapons capability [rendering the Convention] an indispensable element in global efforts to deal effectively with weapons of mass destruction."

The Convention - which promises to be the first multilateral convention with comprehensive provisions for implementation which will apply equally to all parties - was opened for signature in Paris from 13 to 15 January 1993, at which no fewer than 130 States signed the Convention. As of 12 October there was a total of 154 signatories, four of which had also ratified it (Fiji, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sweden).

The provisions of the Convention are far-reaching, going well beyond the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which banned the use of chemical weapons only in armed conflict. The new Convention will not only prohibit the use of poisonous gasses and asphyxiants, but also prohibit their development, production, stock-piling and/or transfer. It will also provide for the destruction of existing chemical weapons and their production facilities. Most significantly it provides for a comprehensive verification system to ensure compliance, including provision for challenge inspection and investigation in cases of alleged violations.

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