

Press release
Genf, 30 June 2003

Forum on chemical weapons destruction concludes in Geneva:

**Declares Weapons Demilitarization an Important Tool Against Terrorism
And Emphasizes Need for International Partnership**

Geneva - Over 100 representatives of fourteen countries, non-governmental and international organizations concluded a day and a half of frank and open discussions in Geneva on Friday, June 27, concerning the destruction of chemical weapons in Russia. Sponsored by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Green Cross, and hosted by the United Nations Mission at the Palais des Nations, the Forum addressed the challenges of destroying some 40,000 tons of chemical weapons stored at seven stockpile sites in Russia and provided a platform for exchanges between Russia and nations providing assistance.

Director General Rogelio Pfirter of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, which implements international oversight and verification of chemical weapons destruction, exhorted all participants to accelerate and expand their efforts to help Russia with its destruction plans and to work towards the current 2007 deadline for global abolition of chemical weapons. The complete elimination for the first time of a whole class of weapons of mass destruction "unites us," stated Pfirter, and is "an important tool against proliferation and international terrorism."

Micheline Calmy-Rey, head of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the importance of a strong financial support and of coordinated actions between Russia, the U.S, other G-8 and smaller nations as a key factor for a timely and successful Russian chemical weapons destruction program. She also underlined the active and ongoing support of Switzerland for Russian weapons demilitarization and the recent appropriation of 17 million Swiss francs to help Russia's multi-billion-dollar effort. Toni Frisch of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Jean-Jacques De Dardel, head of the Center for International Security Policy, emphasized amongst other the importance of public involvement, facilitation by Green Cross as a neutral NGO, and community development in implementing weapons destruction in the Former Soviet Union.

The Forum took place at a moment when destruction efforts in the five chemical weapons possessor nations are massively accelerating with a doubling of destruction capacities over the next two years. For supporting the destruction of the Russian chemical weapons arsenal, the world's largest, the U.S. has pledged some \$900 million; and the G-8 last year in Kananaskis (Canada) pledged \$20 billion over ten years for nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons destruction in Russia, and reiterated this plan at the Evian summit earlier this month. Also Russia commits this year five billion rubles (\$161 million) for chemical weapons destruction. The need for true international partnership for the Russian destruction program was emphasized. The participants underlined the importance of such informal meeting venues.

Green Cross Founding President Mikhail Gorbachev welcomed the Forum by pointing out the "historic importance" of abolishing Cold War legacies -- nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons stockpiles -- and the central nature of these steps to international security and peace.

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