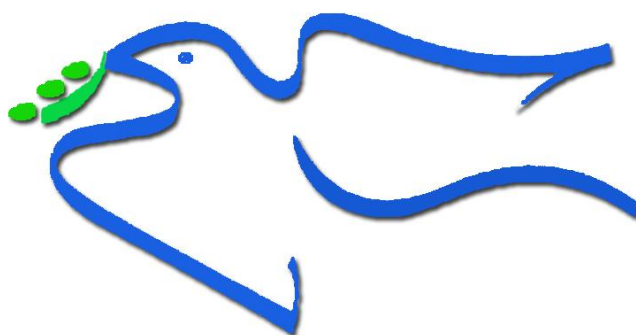


A Century of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Enough!

Ypres 22 – 24 April 2015

موزه صلح تهران



Tehran Peace Museum

Personal Account of Iranian Survivor of Chemical Weapons

Mr. Hassan HassaniSa'di

23 April 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends – good morning.

My name is Hassan HassaniSa'di. I am here today to represent the Tehran Peace Museum in Iran. It is a great honour for me to be invited to Ypres – on such an important anniversary – to speak about my own experiences in being exposed to chemical weapons.

In my message today, I would like to talk about two points. Firstly, I would like to briefly share with you how I became exposed to sulphur mustard gas and the consequences I – and others like me - have had to suffer. And, secondly, I would like to talk about the role of survivors, who use ourselves as living examples to raise awareness about the prohibition of chemical weapons.

I was born 49 years ago in Kerman in southern Iran. When Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, most young Iranian men felt it was their duty to defend their country. Like most patriotic young men, I too wanted to defend my country. And in 1984, I joined up as a volunteer soldier.

By 1986, I had become a scuba diver in a reconnaissance unit and was stationed in the Faw Peninsula in the southern sector near the Persian Gulf. On the 10th of February of that year, I was involved in a military offensive at Faw.

It was three days after that battle, February 13th 1986 at 8 o'clock in the morning, while resting on the east bank of the Arvand River directly across from Faw, when the chemical attack happened.

Iraqi jets dropped several bombs. There was a lot of confusion. There was so much smoke and dark fluid was splashing everywhere. We realized it was a chemical attack.

After the initial panic was over, I felt fine, so I went back to work.

But mustard gas takes a while to do its damage. Within an hour, I began to realize that there was something seriously wrong. I started to vomit, terrible vile vomiting. My skin started to burn and my eyes felt as if they were on fire. Breathing was difficult.

Since that day, I have been suffering the consequences of the chemical weapons. My skin is healed but I continue to have very limited eyesight. I continue to have problems breathing. I need constant medical support.

During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi forces used 1,800 metric tonnes of sulphur mustard gas. Over 1 million people (both soldiers and civilians) were exposed to chemical weapons. Less than 3% of victims actually died from exposure to mustard agents. The rest of us have been coping with the medical complications of mustard gas ever since the attacks.

Today, 75,000 Iranian chemical weapons victims, like myself, continue to receive support for their chronic exposure to sulphur mustard gas.

And this brings me to the second part of my message – looking to the future.

After my part in the war was over, I felt that I had done my duty. I had served my country well. I had done my bit. My responsibilities were over.

But I was wrong.

I, and my fellow survivors, have a crucial role to play in using ourselves, our personal stories, to educate the world about what happens when chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction are used.

In 2005, I moved to Tehran and I became involved with the Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support and I started to volunteer as a guide at the Tehran Peace Museum. When visitors look at us, listen to us, they understand why chemical weapons must be banned.

At the Tehran Peace Museum, we survivors are realistic about our future. Already, in the last five months, we have lost two of our veterans, and we know that the clock is ticking for the rest of us.

We feel it is our responsibility to educate people about the atrocities of chemical weapons. We talk about how war has scarred our generation, but we also share the responsibility in building peace for the future.

We have started a youth awareness programme called the Young Reporters. Students from Tehran's secondary schools participate in reporting about chemical weapons and their consequences to their peers. They ask questions about war that young people want answered. They share their own ideas about disarmament and peace.

The Tehran Peace Museum is also a hub of peace initiatives and we have many volunteers from various sectors of society involved in our programmes. Iranian artists, actors, filmmakers, athletes and many students come to the museum to cooperate in our peace building activities. We host doctors, for example members of the IPPNW, who invest their time in educating against weapons of mass destruction. We are building partnerships with the United Nations in Iran and with some foreign missions to help raise awareness against chemical weapons and develop peace projects.

In December 2013, a delegation from the Tehran Peace Museum visited the OPCW headquarters in The Hague. While we were there, we put forward a proposal to use survivors of gas attacks as messengers for peace to raise awareness against chemical weapons. We cooperate to encourage those countries that have not yet signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, to think about their responsibility towards world peace, and sign this important convention.

And, as living testament to the horrific consequences of chemical warfare, we are engaged in a bi-lingual oral history project. Through our Voices of Peace project, our stories can be accessed on the museum's website. I invite to please read them.

In concluding my message today, I would like to please ask you to join us in raising awareness against chemical weapons. Read and share our stories with the world. And join us in our determination to learn from our past to build a culture of peace for all of us in the future.

I would like to thank you all for listening to my message today. We – from the Tehran Peace Museum – appreciate your attention and your support.

I thank you all very much!