

Conference Report

10 Years of The Hague Ethical Guidelines - A Testament to Ethical Use of Chemistry and International Cooperation

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In January 1993, history was made in Paris when the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was opened for signature. In just three days, 130 countries pledged their support for this landmark treaty aiming for the control and the destruction of chemical weapons.^[1] Now, over 30 years later, this landmark treaty has proven to be a resounding success and a powerful testament to international cooperation. All declared chemical weapon stockpiles have been destroyed, and roughly 98% of the entire world population lives under the protection of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its CWC, working tirelessly for a world free of chemical weapons!^[1]

In 2015, an international group of 24 distinguished chemists recognized that while significant progress in the destruction of declared chemical weapons has been made, additional measures to prevent their reemergence were necessary. To ensure the peaceful and ethical use of chemistry, they developed the The Hague Ethical Guidelines.^[2] This framework of nine core principles was designed to ensure that across the globe chemistry is used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

To mark the 10th anniversary of this framework, the German Chemical Society (GDCh) started planning a celebration at the headquarters of the OPCW in The Hague. During the 27th Spring Symposium of the German Young Chemists' Network (JCF), discussions involving representatives of the JCF and the young Swiss Chemical Society (youngSCS) clearly showed such a milestone must include international participation of the next generation of chemists.

Their vision, to celebrate and communicate the mission of the The Hague Ethical Guidelines, quickly took shape. With the help of Dr. Peter Hotchkiss from OPCW, they generated a joint campaign, raising public awareness on the Dual Use of Chemicals. This culminated in a webinar on the *Dual Use of Chemicals* with invited talks from two OPCW partners: GEKA and Labor Spiez. Within just a few months, delegations from Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands gathered at the OPCW to celebrate and discuss the future of the Hague Ethical Guidelines.

On August 29th, the delegations gathered at the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW, which houses the organization's administration (Fig. 1). There, the group received an introduction to the history of the OPCW, followed by a tour of the Ypres auditorium and a viewing of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize, which OPCW was awarded. Through a series of short presentations, the group learned how the OPCW operates, responds to inquiries, and what it means to work for the organization.

The delegations were then welcomed at the German Embassy, where Thomas Schieb, the German Ambassador to the OPCW shared insights into his work.

The final stop was the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology, located in the suburbs of The Hague, where the group toured the laboratories and equipment storage facilities (Fig. 2). There, Prof. Alastair Hay and Dr. Detlef Männig, both of whom played key roles in the development of the The Hague Ethical



Fig. 1. The delegations from GDCh, JCF, Royal Netherlands Chemical Society (KNCV), jongKNCV, and youngSCS at the OPCW Technical Secretariat. Photo credit: OPCW.^[3]

Guidelines in 2015 and CWC in 1993, concluded the day with an inspiring workshop. The session focused on the future of the OPCW, the continued relevance of the The Hague Ethical Guidelines, and how they need to adapt to an ever evolving geopolitical landscape.^[4]



Fig. 2. Participants of the Workshop trying on an OPCW-issue protection suit against chemical weapons, as used by OPCW operatives in field work and training. Photo credit: Dr. Hans-Georg Weinig.

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[1] <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/opcw-numbers>.

[2] <https://www.opcw.org/hague-ethical-guidelines>.

[3] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/opcw/>.

[4] A link to this article from the German Chemical Society (GDCh) <https://gdch.app/article/jungeschemieforum-jcf-4154807>.