

# Remarks to Reporters on the Vice President's Trip to Geneva, Switzerland, To Present the United States Initiative for a Ban on Chemical Weapons

**April 16, 1984**

The President. The Vice President leaves tonight on an extremely vital mission in the cause of peace, and it's a mission which all Americans and people around the world, I'm sure, support. Our goal is to eliminate from this Earth one of the most horrible and terrifying weapons known to mankind -- chemical weapons.

To most people, when we say "chemical weapons," I'm sure they realize we're talking mainly about the various poison gases. And some of us who are old enough remember the horror in World War I when only one side had those weapons and first used them against allied forces that were unable to protect themselves against them or to retaliate.

On Wednesday, in the 40-nation Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the Vice President will present an American initiative for a comprehensive worldwide ban on chemical weapons. And we know this won't be easy to achieve. We're not the first nation that attempted to control chemical weapons; there've been previous international efforts, including the Geneva Protocol of 1925. But such efforts dealt only with the actual use of such weapons, and they lacked effective compliance provisions.

History proves that success in arms control requires ensuring that agreements are lived up to. Chemical weapons provide a sad example, as I indicated, of past arms control failures. In recent years, both combatants and noncombatants have fallen victim to them in several areas of the world. We must move to ban these weapons now, but not only their use but also the development, production, and possession of them. And each country must have confidence that a new international agreement is being complied with.

That's what our treaty proposal is designed to do. We've worked long and hard to develop it, and we think it's a first-rate proposal. Of course, there will be hard negotiations ahead, but we're ready to work side by side with the representatives of the Soviet Union and other countries to achieve the goal of an effective ban on chemical weapons. And we hope that once they've seen the full treaty proposal, the Soviet Union and others will respond seriously and negotiate in good faith.

In seeing the Vice President off, I'd like to remind him of the motto of a school that he once attended. "The end depends on the beginning." Well, these words are especially right for this occasion. The goals and standards we set now will do much to determine whether we're successful in banning chemical weapons. And that's why I've asked the Vice President to undertake this mission. His journey to Geneva with this new American treaty proposal reflects the United States commitment to eliminate forever the threat of chemical warfare.

And, Vice President Bush, we wish you Godspeed.

The Vice President. Well, thank you, Mr. President.

Let me simply add, first I'm delighted that you and the Secretary of State and others are enthusiastic about this mission. Secondly, it's a return for me, a return to Geneva after the mission you sent me on 14 months ago to explain to this Conference on Disarmament your commitment on getting rid of these chemical weapons.

While in Geneva I'll have an opportunity to, in a broad context in front of that prestigious group, to explain your commitment to talks on these other arms forums as well -- MBFR, START, INF, Confidence-building.

And I hope that this trip will result in more understanding, and, I think even more important than that, I hope it will result in a first major step towards your conviction of banning these weapons. I'll sure try.

The President. I know you will.

Q. Mr. President, the Soviets have called this a propaganda trick, and -- --

Mr. Speakes. Lights, please.

Q. -- -- say that the proposal's unacceptable on its face -- --

Mr. Speakes. No questions. I'm sorry, no questions.

Q. -- -- do you think there's any hope for a serious negotiation?

The President. He's saying, ``No questions."''

Q. Well, you can overrule him. [Laughter]

The Vice President. We'll be discussing that at length in Geneva, incidentally, that question and any others like it. It's a very serious proposal, and a good proposal -- a far-reaching proposal.

Mr. Speakes. Thank you. That's it.

*Note: The President spoke at 10:04 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.*

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<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/41684a.htm>