What are weapons of mass destruction?

What are they?

They are atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical or biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which have characteristics comparable in destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above.

Source: Lexicon for arms control, disarmament and confidence-building (UNICIR, 2003)

Have they been used??

Weapons of mass destruction have been used in different scenarios, including armed conflicts, resulting in victims both among combatants and civilians. Their use, starting in the 20th century, left several generations of victims and irreversible environmental damage.

Use of toxic gases during WWI
Collier’s New Photographic History of the World’s War (New York, 1918)

How is their use controlled?

There are instruments that prohibit their use and seek to prevent their proliferation.

- 1970: IAEA Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
- 1972: Biological Weapons Convention
- 1996: Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
- 1997: Chemical Weapons Convention
- 2017: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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