

**NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT****UPDATE ON THE IMPACT OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE
NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON THE ORGANISATION
FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS PROGRAMME IN 2020**

1. On 17 April 2020, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) issued a Note updating States Parties on the impact of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on the Organisation for the Prohibition on Chemical Weapons (OPCW) programme in 2020 (S/1870/2020, dated 17 April 2020), following Note S/1863/2020 (dated 20 March 2020). The present Note provides an update for States Parties on the measures that have been taken by the Secretariat in response to the pandemic.
2. The internal Task Force established by the Director-General continues to monitor and assess the situation, in particular the measures put in place by the Dutch authorities, and to make recommendations to the Director-General on appropriate measures for the OPCW. As further explained below, the Secretariat is making every effort to minimise to the extent possible the impact of this situation on the implementation of the OPCW’s activities and programme in 2020.

STAFFING

3. In line with the Dutch Government’s directive to work from home as much as possible, Secretariat staff will continue to work remotely as far as feasible. In order to ensure the health and safety of those staff members whose functions must be carried out at the Headquarters or at the Laboratory, the relevant buildings and offices have undergone a risk assessment and reorganisation, where necessary, coupled with additional sanitisation and a shift work system for office hours, to respect sanitary and social distancing requirements. A phased return to office plan is currently being developed by the Task Force in keeping with the phased approach of the Dutch Government in response to the evolving situation in the Netherlands.
4. Group visits and private visitors to OPCW facilities remain suspended until further notice.
5. Non-essential travel worldwide, including for training, is suspended and will be rescheduled to take place later in the year, as necessary, when circumstances allow.



MEETINGS

6. Requests by States Parties for the use of meeting rooms at the Headquarters for in-person meetings cannot, unfortunately, be accommodated at this time. The Secretariat may be able to provide technical support to States Parties wishing to hold remote meetings.
7. The scheduled meeting of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) will take place as an in-person meeting in the Ieper Room from 7 to 10 July 2020. The modalities for holding this meeting, in line with the Dutch regulations on the holding of meetings deemed essential for business continuity, have been extensively discussed by the Executive Council Bureau under the leadership of the Chairperson of the Council and in regional groups through the facilitation of the Vice-Chairpersons. The modalities that will apply to this meeting, in particular the limitation of the number of persons in the Ieper Room and other meeting rooms, have been put in place to ensure the safety and health of all delegates and staff involved in the meeting. As done previously, health and safety information and guidelines will be provided to all meeting participants in advance of the meeting.

VERIFICATION

8. With respect to Article IV inspections, the Secretariat continues its verification activities at the chemical weapons destruction facilities, under temporary modifications in accordance with Secretariat Notes EC-94/S/1, EC-94/S/2, EC-94/S/3, and EC-94/S/4 (all dated 6 April 2020), in light of the need to take measures to ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel at the sites, and taking into account the applicable health and safety regulations of the concerned State Party. The Secretariat continues to closely consult the National Authority of the concerned State Party in this regard.
9. Inspections related to abandoned chemical weapons continue to be postponed, and will be rescheduled in consultation with the concerned States Parties. The Secretariat continues to consult with both concerned States Parties in this regard.
10. Inspections related to old chemical weapons continue to be postponed and will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
11. Inspections related to Article V and Council decision EC-67/DEC.7 (dated 16 February 2012) in respect of former chemical weapons production facilities will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
12. In view of the suspension of Article VI inspections in all States Parties, the Secretariat is developing a plan to resume Article VI inspections when the circumstances allow, taking into account any national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 as well as the health and safety of inspectors. As part of the development of this plan, the Secretariat has begun consultations with National Authorities, including through the Industry Cluster, in order to identify the parameters within which Article VI inspections could resume. When it is feasible for such inspections to resume, taking into account the public health situation in States Parties, any travel restrictions, and the availability of flights, the Secretariat will make every effort to optimise the

number of Article VI inspections conducted. The Secretariat intends to prioritise inspections at Schedule 1 facilities, as well as at Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 plant sites where initial inspections have not yet taken place as required under the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”). However, as previously reported, it will not be possible to complete all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020, owing to the measures taken in response to the pandemic situation. Those inspections that are not completed before the end of this year will be prioritised in 2021.

13. All missions of the Secretariat in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to be postponed until further notice. The Secretariat will monitor the situation closely and will keep the Syrian Arab Republic and States Parties duly informed.
14. The Secretariat continues to receive and evaluate States Parties’ declarations and amendments under Articles III, IV, V, and VI.
15. The Secretariat continues to implement the provisions of Note S/1820/2019 (dated 23 December 2019) regarding amendments under Article XV of the Convention, including by providing examples of newly added scheduled chemicals in its online scheduled chemical database as well as in the Electronic Declaration Information System (EDIS) tool. In addition, on 20 May 2020 an addendum to the Secretariat’s Note S/1821/2019/Rev.1 (dated 14 January 2020) was issued, which contains generic structures of the newly added scheduled chemicals (S/1821/2019/Rev.1/Add.1, dated 20 May 2020).

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

16. In-person capacity-building events continue to be postponed to a later date, in consultation with the concerned States Parties, and will resume when circumstances allow. As from 2 June 2020, the International Cooperation and Assistance Division (ICA) will offer capacity-building support through alternative means using modern technology, with due regard to confidentiality requirements. This will allow a number of postponed in-person events to be adapted into remote learning opportunities. Providing such platforms is intended to allow States Parties to sustain and enhance their knowledge, capacities, and networks. The details regarding these remote learning opportunities will be communicated to States Parties and to all stakeholders in due course. In addition, the ICA is exploring the feasibility of other types of online events, and is enhancing its internal capacity to provide effective support to States Parties, including through new and innovative means of programme delivery.
17. Notwithstanding the above efforts, it may be challenging for the ICA to be able to complete all of its activities originally planned for 2020, whether in-person or through alternative online means. It is therefore anticipated that further adjustments to the Division’s work programme will need to be made; these will be communicated to States Parties in a timely manner.

NEXT STEPS

18. The Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and to adopt appropriate mitigating measures, and will keep States Parties apprised of any relevant developments.