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**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE  
CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES AT ITS TWENTY-THIRD SESSION**

Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Twenty-Third Session of the Conference of the States Parties. At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Yun-young Lee on his election as the Chairperson of the Conference. I wish you success in your new and important mission. Our outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, has earned our gratitude for leading the last session of the Conference ably and efficiently. Acknowledgement is also due to Ambassador Jana Reinišová of the Czech Republic for her effective guidance of the work of the Executive Council as its Chairperson. Her predecessor, Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal of Bangladesh, played his part with skill and dedication.
2. I am deeply honoured to address the Conference of the States Parties, for the first time as Director-General. Your trust and confidence have been heart-warming and I thank all States Parties for the support and cooperation that they have extended to me in my new role. I will not fail to recognise the dedicated staff of the Technical Secretariat for their continuing commitment and professionalism.
3. 2018 has been an eventful year. We have dealt with difficult issues and sought to strengthen the authority of the Convention in order to maintain its enduring relevance. The implementation of the Convention continues to advance on all fronts, and everybody agrees that this Organisation is very much needed. However, the international norm against the use of chemical weapons has come under strain. The repeated use of chemical weapons poses a challenge that must be met with strong and unified resolve.
4. Given our obligation to protect and to preserve the norms of the Convention, the Secretariat on its part has continued to respond to all credible reports indicating a possible violation of its prohibitions.
5. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) updated the Executive Council at its regular sessions in July and October on its activities in the Syrian Arab Republic. The FFM issued reports on the use of chemicals as weapons in Al Hamadaniyah, Karm Al-Tarrab, and Saraqib, and regarding two incidents in Ltamenah. On 6 July 2018, the Secretariat issued an interim report regarding an earlier incident of alleged use on 7 April in Douma in the Syrian Arab Republic. The FFM continues to collect and



analyse information with regard to this inquiry and will provide a final report on its findings in due course.

6. The Declaration Assessment Team continued its work to resolve all gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration and further submissions.
7. The Secretariat deployed two technical assistance visits to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, upon its request, in response to incidents involving a chemical warfare agent in Salisbury and Amesbury in March and July this year.
8. In June this year, the Conference of the States Parties convened at its Fourth Special Session. It adopted a decision entitled "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use" (C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018). This decision calls on the Secretariat to, inter alia, identify those who are responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The decision also looks beyond Syria with regard to the identification of those involved in the use of chemicals as weapons. It enables the Secretariat to assist, upon their request, States Parties in their investigations into the use of chemical weapons in their own territories. As requested pursuant to the decision, I have presented to the Conference elements on how the Secretariat can establish the capability to carry out this task.
9. In its broader approach, the decision also asks the Secretariat to examine ways to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. The Organisation can play a significant role in strengthening global chemical security, to ensure that toxic chemicals do not fall into the wrong hands.
10. For this purpose, the decision requires the submission of proposals to enhance the capacity of the Secretariat and the tools available to it to strengthen implementation of the Convention's verification regime. It also requires the formulation of options covering further assistance that the Secretariat might provide to States Parties.
11. These proposals have also been submitted for the consideration of the Conference. They aim to identify ways and means to assist States Parties to implement their obligations under the Convention, to enhance chemical security, and to enable international cooperation in the field of chemical activities for purposes not prohibited under the Convention.
12. The revised Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2019 (EC-89/CRP.1/Rev.2, dated 12 October 2018 and Corr.1, dated 16 October 2018) is before the Conference for its consideration. It reflects the resource requirements for the Secretariat to carry out its functions in the coming year. It also refers to investments in cybersecurity, physical security, and business continuity.
13. The draft budget addresses the current reality confronting the OPCW with regard to new and evolving threats. It also responds to the increasing responsibilities and expectations that States Parties have reposed in the Secretariat. The proposal has been discussed in the Programme and Budget facilitation process, and in the Executive Council. It is now being presented to the Conference for its consideration.

14. In order for the Secretariat to continue to fulfil its vital mandate, a Conference approved Programme and Budget for 2019 is necessary. Ensuring that the Secretariat is effectively staffed and managed is critical to our continuing effectiveness and success.
15. The consistent support of States Parties has made the Convention one of the most effective and successful international treaties in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. I trust that at this defining juncture, States Parties will be ready to once again extend their support in preserving the institutional efficiency and effectiveness of the OPCW.
16. This year, we engaged independent experts to assess the impact of the tenure policy on the OPCW (EC-89/DG.28, dated 2 October 2018). The report of those experts, which was already presented to you, puts forward a number of recommendations to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of the tenure policy at the OPCW. I would encourage you to give these your serious consideration, with a view to introducing adaptations suited to the continued financial and operational effectiveness of the Secretariat.
17. Moving on to the topic of demilitarisation, as at 31 October 2018, a total of 68,044 metric tonnes (MT) or 96.5% of the declared Category 1 chemical weapons had been destroyed under verification by the Secretariat. Also as at 31 October 2018, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 25,320 MT, or 91% of its declared Category 1 chemical weapons.
18. The destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) by Japan on the territory of China continued in 2018 at the Haerbaling destruction facility. Since the beginning of the process, as at 31 August, 51,000 items of declared ACW have been destroyed. This represents a significant proportion of the more than 63,000 such items that have so far been recovered. Since the last session of the Conference, 12 related inspections have been conducted in China.
19. In Europe, seven inspections of old chemical weapons were conducted in six States Parties, namely, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
20. In Libya, sampling operations at the former chemical weapons storage site in Ruwagha, concluded on 5 April. The overall project will complete the destruction of the remaining Category 2 chemical material tanks. In addition, the degradation products of Category 1 chemicals previously destroyed on the territory of Libya will be stabilised. All subsequent waste will be processed by solar evaporation in an environmentally compliant manner. I thank the governments of Canada, Cyprus, Finland, New Zealand, Spain, and Tunisia, as well as the European Union, for their generous support of these activities in Libya.
21. Verification activities remain on track for the current year. In 2018, 241 Article VI inspections are being carried out by the Secretariat as scheduled.
22. Progress has been made in our project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The new Centre will increase the Secretariat's ability to effectively implement the Convention in key areas

of verification and international cooperation. The contributions received or pledged to date total approximately EUR 7 million. I wish to thank the Government of the Netherlands, our Host Country, which has pledged financial support needed for land acquisition for the new Centre. I wish also to extend my gratitude to the governments of Belgium, Canada, Estonia, the Republic of Korea, Poland, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for their generous voluntary contributions. This project will create tangible benefits for all our members and I renew my appeal to all States Parties to support it.

23. In the area of international cooperation and technical assistance, over 96 training courses, workshops, seminars, and other capacity-building programmes have been delivered in 2018, to the benefit of some 2016 participants. I would like to thank the many States Parties that have provided generous voluntary financial and in-kind contributions to our work in this area.
24. The Africa Programme remains a critical capacity-building mechanism. It is designed to meet the specific needs of States Parties from Africa in terms of their implementation of the Convention. The fourth phase of the programme is under way and its progress is outlined in the report “The Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention” (EC-89/DG.14 C-23/DG.10, dated 5 September 2018).
25. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) held its Twenty-Seventh Session in March. The SAB produced a working paper on new types of nerve agents and submitted its report on developments in science and technology to the Fourth Review Conference. This report, inter alia, reiterates the SAB’s recommendation for a review of the Convention’s schedules of chemicals to ensure that they are accurate and up to date.
26. On 16 October, I received a joint proposal from Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States of America for a technical change to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention. In accordance with Article XV of the Convention, the Secretariat is currently evaluating the proposal.
27. This month, November 2018, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that put an end to the First World War, also known as the Great War. In Ieper, Belgium, some infamous battles took place. On 22 April 1915, more than 150 tonnes of chlorine gas were released on the Allied trenches. In a matter of minutes, more than 1,000 soldiers died, and hundreds were badly injured.
28. With these few words, I would like to invite us all to remember those who died and suffered on that day, and since then, those who have been killed or injured by these horrendous weapons. I would like to pay tribute and express my deepest respect. Today, there is no doubt that the lessons that humanity learned from this war need to remain with us forever. It is our common and individual responsibility to impart the memory of this experience to the new generations.

Mr Chairperson,

29. The full text of my statement detailing our work over the last year will be circulated to delegations as an official document of this session.