



Remarks by the OPCW Deputy Director-General at the Twenty-Ninth Session of the Scientific Advisory Board

As delivered on 1 September 2020, The Hague, Netherlands

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished Board members,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today, virtually, to the Twenty-Ninth Session of the Scientific Advisory Board. I would like, at the outset, to convey to you the well-wishes of the Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and to extend, on his behalf and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to the seven eminent experts who have just joined the Board. I congratulate you on your appointments.

The last 8 months have seen the world need to respond to the Covid-19 virus – an unprecedented challenge in the 21st century. Life and business worldwide have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Certain aspects of the work of the OPCW have also been impacted by its repercussions. The Organisation continues to manage the changes dictated to us in this context to allow us to fulfil our important mandate. As a case in point, we are convened today in this online format as the Scientific Advisory Board has much to discuss.

Distinguished Board members,

There have been many major developments since the Board last met in June 2019. Allegations of chemical weapons use have persisted in Syria and the Fact-Finding Mission has continued its activities. In addition, the Investigation and Identification Team, responsible for identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, issued its first report in April of this year. Furthermore, since the last meeting of the SAB, for the first time in the history of the Convention, new chemicals have been added to the Schedule 1 list of chemicals in the Annex on Chemicals in the Chemicals Weapon Convention. The SAB's contribution to the process has been highly appreciated.

Alongside these important developments, the OPCW is continuing to strengthen and reenergize its collaborations with other international organisations, such as Interpol, and with the chemical industry worldwide. Only via collaboration and cooperation with external partners will we be able to fully achieve our vision of a world free of chemical weapons and the threat of their use, in which chemistry is used for peace, progress, and prosperity.

I am also pleased to inform you that the OPCW is continuing to make significant progress in upgrading the OPCW Laboratory into a “Centre for Chemistry and Technology”. The design

of the Centre is being finalized. Last month, we submitted an application for the construction permit. The Request for Proposal Phase, in which the pre-qualified bidders will submit their bids for construction, is expected to begin in October. In terms of funding, we have received contributions and pledges amounting to 30.6 million from 43 States Parties, the European Union, Israel (a signatory State), in addition to a personal contribution. We continue to be optimistic about the perspective of receiving, by the end of this year, the 2.6 million euros which is still required for the realisation of the project.

This Centre will ensure our technological and scientific capabilities continue to strengthen the verification regime. It will also allow the OPCW to enhance its cooperation and capacity-building programmes and to expand our ability to facilitate and encourage international scientific collaboration. We continue to greatly appreciate all of the support and endorsement that the Board has maintained for this important project. You will receive a detailed presentation during this session from the Technical Secretariat on the progress achieved.

Distinguished members,

The Board has continued to be busy and productive since the last SAB meeting. The Temporary Working Group on Investigative Science and Technology has concluded its work and a final report has been drafted. The Director-General is very interested in the Board's advice and recommendations regarding the Temporary Working Group's final report.

The Board should also consider how emerging tools and new scientific approaches fit into the dynamic and evolving operating environment of the OPCW. Many of you have continued to participate in and lead scientific conferences, meetings and research. Please continue to share your experiences with the Board – this sharing of knowledge and expertise contributes greatly to the Board's abilities and strength, which in turn benefits and informs the OPCW.

To conclude, I thank you for your attention and I wish you a productive Session.
