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OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE NINETY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Fifth Session of the Executive Council.
2. At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez for his continuing able leadership and guidance of the Council.
3. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has maintained the delivery pace of programmatic activities in all areas, in line with its obligations.
4. The Secretariat resumed Article VI inspections in mid-September, in accordance with the plan presented to the States Parties last July. This plan prioritises inspections according to the Convention, while taking into account national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 and to safeguard the health and safety of the inspectors.
5. Old chemical weapons inspections were also conducted during the intersessional period at sites in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in Italy.
6. The Secretariat has provided virtual international cooperation and assistance events in all areas, including national implementation, emergency preparedness and response, and the peaceful uses of chemistry.
7. As at 2 October, 22 online capacity-building and international cooperation events had been delivered, benefitting a total of 657 participants. States Parties were informed about the OPCW's operational posture and of the Secretariat's activities through a Note issued on 26 August. This Note updates the information provided through Notes published on 17 April, 20 May, and 3 June.
8. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has continued to develop its technical capabilities and to adapt programmatic delivery to evolving conditions and new modalities.



9. The twentieth edition of the induction workshop for diplomats involved in the work of the Organisation was held virtually on 17 September. Sixteen ambassadors and 91 delegates participated in the event and received a day of briefings from senior managers on all areas of the Secretariat's work.
10. In keeping with usual practice, the Programme and Budget has been a major area of focus in the post-summer intersessional period. States Parties are in receipt of the draft with budgetary proposals to finance our activities in 2021. During the informal consultations, the Secretariat has provided further details and information to States Parties when requested. I would like to thank the co-facilitators, Mr Marcin Kawałowski from the Permanent Representation of Poland and Mr Matteo Fachinotti from the Permanent Representation of Switzerland, for their dedicated efforts.
11. The Draft Programme and Budget for 2021 amounts to EUR 71.74 million. It is calibrated to provide the necessary resources to implement the Secretariat's operational and support programmes. The draft budget seeks to strike a balance between the financial pressures driven by the current global situation, and the steady loss of purchasing power of the OPCW budget.
12. The proposed budget includes an increase of EUR 780,000 compared to the 2020 budget. At the same time, States Parties' assessed contributions will remain unchanged. The Secretariat is proposing to reallocate a portion of travel- and conference-related costs from the core regular budget to extra-ordinary provisions, as a result of the uncertain impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on programmatic activities in 2021. These provisions are intended to be financed through a proposed "COVID-19 Variability Impact Fund", which would be funded by a portion of the 2018 cash surplus. This approach would help bridge the widening gap between assessed contributions and the costs of programmatic delivery.
13. However, and as noted by the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial matters in its latest report, the practice of budgeting at zero nominal growth for States Parties' assessed contributions is not sustainable with the current programmatic portfolio, as staff and operational costs continue to increase from year to year. As a result, States Parties will inevitably have to choose between increased assessed contributions and reduced programmatic activities.
14. Meanwhile, I am pleased to note that States Parties have supported two strategic financing initiatives. Firstly, the establishment of a Major Capital Investment Fund, which will help plan for and fund long-term capital replacements that are becoming necessary and which require attention.
15. Secondly, the transition to a biennial Programme and Budget cycle for 2022 and 2023 will increase organisational efficiency and support longer-term planning. In the same vein, States Parties need to ensure that the Working Capital Fund remains strong to allow for liquidity, should receipt of assessed contributions lag.
16. That said, efficient governance cannot be limited to securing necessary financing. Human resources are another key factor. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay and Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia for facilitating States Parties' discussions on a set of important governance issues, and for the time and interest they are devoting to this important task.

17. I have reported to States Parties on tangible improvements on a number of them, notably on gender balance and knowledge management. I remain committed to making steady progress in these areas. I am encouraged by the constructive engagement from delegations during the recent facilitation round.
18. With regard to the tenure policy, I note again that a more flexible arrangement, comparable to our sister disarmament organisations in Vienna, would be practical for the implementation of the Secretariat's tasks. I will therefore follow with interest further facilitation rounds.
19. Lastly, cybersecurity is an area in which strategic planning and investment are needed. The Organisation has experienced increasingly targeted and sophisticated reconnaissance and cyberattacks since the last session of the Council. Investment is needed in detection tools, as well as in the underlying security-related infrastructure. Moreover, as I have repeatedly highlighted to the Council, a cybersecurity programme, including modern and capable cyberdefence tools, dedicated staff, and sustainable funding is crucial in order to effectively defend the Organisation's systems.
20. Last week, States Parties received a presentation and several reports on activities related to the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical dossier.
21. On 8 April 2020, the Secretariat released the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) (S/1867/2020, dated 8 April 2020). In response to the report, the Council adopted at its last session, in July, the decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-94/DEC.2, dated 9 July 2020).
22. Paragraph 5 of the decision requests the Syrian Arab Republic to complete specific measures, pursuant to paragraph 36 of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, within 90 days. That is by 7 October: tomorrow, Wednesday, at midnight. Up to this moment, the Secretariat has not yet received any submission from the Syrian Arab Republic. I will keep States Parties updated on that matter. Consequently, the Secretariat is still not in a position to consider that the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration is accurate and complete.
23. Pursuant to paragraph 6 of the decision, I will report within 100 days—that is, by 17 October—on whether the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all of the measures requested in paragraph 5 of the decision. At the same time, the IIT continues its investigations into other incidents and will issue further reports in due course.
24. Last week, the Secretariat released two reports of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo on 24 November 2018 and in Saraqib on 1 August 2016 (S/1902/2020 and S/1901/2020, both dated 1 October 2020). The reports concluded that it was not possible for the FFM to establish whether or not chemicals were used as a weapon in those incidents.
25. I hereby reiterate how important it is for the Secretariat to receive from States Parties all available information pertaining to allegations of use of chemical weapons. This is crucial for the FFM to progress in its investigations.

26. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has continued its work to clarify gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies arising from Syria's initial declaration of chemical weapons and subsequent submissions.
27. In a letter dated 25 August 2020, the Syrian National Authority provided information concerning eight of 22 outstanding issues, including two amendments to its initial declaration.
28. The DAT deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic from 22 September to 3 October for the twenty-third round of consultations. The outstanding issues were addressed, as well as the information provided by the Syrian National Authority on 25 August. The Syrian National Authority is still expected to provide the further documentation requested, which remains necessary in order to resolve all outstanding issues.
29. The DAT also collected new samples to replace those collected in October 2019 that deteriorated before their analysis by designated laboratories, as reported to the Council at its previous session. The new samples are already at the OPCW Laboratory for further processing.
30. A report on the work of the DAT during the reporting period has been made available to the Council (EC-95/HP/2, dated 1 October 2020). The Secretariat will release an addendum to this report following the analysis of the information collected.
31. Turning to destruction, as at 1 October 2020, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of 71,092 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.32%, of all declared chemical weapons.
32. As at the same date, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,558 MT, or 95.64%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 4.36% of its stockpile by no later than 2023.
33. The verification of destruction activities at chemical weapons destruction facilities has continued under modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.
34. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACWs) at various sites in China. The thirty-second trilateral meeting between China, Japan, and the Secretariat was held on 23 September 2020 in virtual mode. Destruction operations and related activities such as excavations and recoveries remain suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
35. As at 1 October 2020, approximately 83,700 items of ACWs had been declared as recovered, of which 57,701 ACWs had been destroyed.
36. With regard to international cooperation and assistance, the Secretariat convened four regional online meetings of National Authorities for States Parties in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean in the intersessional period. These events provided an opportunity to discuss regional priorities and the status of implementation of the Convention.

37. The Secretariat launched new virtual training programmes for first responders, as well as a tool to assist States Parties with the design and development of national protection programmes.
38. On 19 August, the Secretariat and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland signed a memorandum of understanding for a project to enhance the capabilities of laboratories from African States Parties and States Parties from Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC). The project focuses on capacity building in seven analytical laboratories in the Africa and GRULAC regions, with the aim of enabling them to join the OPCW designated laboratory network. I sincerely thank the United Kingdom for its interest and generosity.
39. Steady progress has been made in the project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre. The tender process for the main construction contract is under way and the Secretariat expects to award the contract early next year.
40. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 32.2 million have been received from 45 countries, the European Union, and three other donors. The members of the Global Partnership Initiative have also been consistently supporting the project with necessary funds, in particular under Canada's strong leadership, and with Canada's new contribution of EUR 1.6 million announced on 24 September, for which I am very grateful.
41. I sincerely thank all contributors for their generous support, thanks to which the Organisation will soon have at its disposal a fantastic tool that will allow us to expand the activities related to international cooperation. I also wish to recognise the effort and interest demonstrated by the members of the team in charge of the project. Thanks to them, the project is progressing, respecting the budget and the timelines.
42. A further EUR 1.3 million is needed by the end of 2020 to fully fund the project, without which the ChemTech Centre project will have to be adjusted. I renew my appeal to all States Parties from all geographical regions to pledge financial support for this project with amounts that suit their situation.
43. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism met virtually on 2 October under its new Chairperson, Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa. The meeting focused on the importance of the OPCW's partnerships in countering chemical terrorism and featured a presentation from the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). The UNOCT has become an important link between the OPCW's work and the broader United Nations system through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. Given its increasing focus on capacity building, there is potential for greater synergies to be realised.
44. Looking at the coming months, the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is scheduled to be held from 30 November to 4 December 2020.
45. Bearing in mind the evolving situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place by the Host Country, the Secretariat has conducted a thorough analysis. Considerations with respect to health, safety, technical, logistical, and financial aspects brought the Secretariat to the conclusion that holding the session at the World Forum premises remains the most viable option.

46. The Secretariat has been in an active dialogue with the management of the World Forum to identify possible solutions to numerous challenges while pursuing the following key principles:
 - (a) ensuring that the session is held in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Convention; and
 - (b) providing the highest possible standards of health and safety for all delegates and Secretariat staff members.
47. On 1 October, the Secretariat briefed the General Committee about the basic arrangements for the forthcoming session of the Conference:
 - (a) the capacity of the conference rooms will be reduced so as to secure physical distancing of 1.5 metres;
 - (b) States Parties, intergovernmental organisations, and representatives of the global chemical industry and scientific community will be invited to limit their in-person presence at the session to one representative per delegation;
 - (c) the possibility to arrange for one additional seat per delegation is being explored; and
 - (d) the Secretariat is working on technical solutions to provide delegates with online (one-way) access to the proceedings of the sessions in all six OPCW official languages.
48. The participation of representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is to be online only, without setting any precedent for future sessions of the Conference. The accredited NGOs will be able to follow the session remotely and will have the opportunity to address the plenary sitting of the session by means of pre-recorded videos. The detailed guidelines for the delegates to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference are being finalised and will be circulated to the States Parties in due course.
49. For over 23 years, the OPCW has been effectively verifying the destruction of declared chemical weapons. As a result of this success, we are approaching the end of the destruction of all declared stockpiles. However, our mission is far from complete. It has become infinitely more complex and challenging.
50. A recent demonstration of this situation is the alleged poisoning on 20 August of a citizen of the Russian Federation, Mr Alexei Navalny, with a nerve agent. On 3 September, I received a letter from the State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, H.E. Mr Miguel Berger, stating that German experts had found that a nerve agent from the so-called “Novichok group” could be determined as the source of this poisoning. On this basis, the Technical Secretariat adopted specific preparatory measures to be ready to respond to any request from Germany.
51. Throughout this process, the Technical Secretariat has remained in continuous contact with the German authorities and with other States Parties.

52. Subsequently, the Secretariat received from Germany a request for technical assistance under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention. A team of experts from the Secretariat independently collected biomedical samples from Mr Navalny for analysis by OPCW designated laboratories. Upon receipt of the analysis results, the Secretariat's report was shared with the German authorities. Relevant information will be shared by Germany in due course.
53. On 1 October, I received a letter from H.E. Ambassador Alexander Shulgin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OPCW, asking that I consider sending a team of experts to the Russian Federation. I responded the next day, confirming the Secretariat's readiness to assist the Russian Federation and requesting the necessary clarifications from the Russian Federation in order to compose the team of experts to respond to this request.
54. I welcome this engagement of the States Parties directly concerned by this issue. These requests demonstrate the trust that States Parties have in the professionalism of the Secretariat in dealing with allegations of use of chemical weapons, through provision of independent technical expertise.
55. In closing, I reiterate that such an abhorrent incident is a matter of grave concern. Under the Chemical Weapons Convention, any poisoning of an individual through the use of a nerve agent is considered a use of chemical weapons.
56. I trust States Parties will consider actions they deem necessary to uphold the total ban against the use of chemical weapons.
57. The mission of the OPCW is as much enduring as it is challenging. You can count on my personal commitment and that of my staff in the shared endeavour of freeing the world of chemical weapons. We owe it to the victims, whom we always keep in our thoughts while delivering on the mandate that has been given to us.

Mr Chairperson,

58. My report to the Council at its Ninety-Fifth Session is detailed. The full text of my statement will be circulated to delegations as an official document of this session.
59. Thank you for your attention.

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