



Opening Remarks by the OPCW Director-General at the 22nd Annual Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

As delivered on 23 November 2020, The Hague, Netherlands

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to the 22nd Annual Meeting of National Authorities. For more than twenty years, this meeting has been an important forum for fostering cooperation between National Authorities and the Secretariat of the OPCW.

I am pleased to see that so many participants, from every geographical region, are taking part in this meeting. This broad representation demonstrates the dedication and commitment of States Parties to the Convention.

This year, the annual meeting has been adapted to an online format in response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. It is focused on providing States Parties with the latest information necessary to ensure effective national implementation of the Convention. Without the right national legislation there is no way to implement the Convention and we have to work all together giving this matter full priority.

The meeting today also provides an opportunity for States Parties to share regional and individual best practices. The full and effective implementation of the Convention remains a substantial contribution to international peace and security. In this regard, the OPCW's technical assistance programmes support States Parties at every stage of the legislative adoption and implementation process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To this day, 119 of 193 States Parties have adopted legislation that comprehensively implements their obligations under the Convention. Thirty-nine States Parties have legislation covering some of the initial measures. However, 33 do not have or have not reported any implementing legislation.

Universal legal implementation of the Convention is not a distant goal. It is important to note that 68 States Parties have draft legislation pending before government or parliamentary bodies. National Authorities play a critical role during this legislative adoption process. The level of commitment and knowledge of a National Authority has a profound effect on the passage of a country's draft bill.

The Secretariat continues to be committed to work with all you National Authorities to enhance your capacity to drive implementation. Since the last Annual Meeting, the Secretariat has provided a range of capacity-building programmes to support the drafting, adoption, and implementation of legislation. We are here to share our expertise, from workshops for drafting legislation, to programmes aimed at promoting the enactment of draft bills.

These activities have continued, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat has re-shaped traditional in-person training, to maximise the potential of technology solutions, to meet our States Parties capacity building needs. In February, the Secretariat launched an online platform for States Parties to submit updates on the status of Article VII implementation. We have developed the capacity to provide online legislative review support, to assist States Parties in identifying potential gaps in existing legal frameworks.

Increasingly, the Secretariat is focusing on supporting States Parties in addressing legislative and regulatory issues to improve chemical security. Across the world, thousands of tons of toxic chemicals are produced, transported, stored, traded, and consumed daily for entirely legitimate ends. Still, the risk exists that fractions of these dangerous substances, if diverted with ill intent, can cause serious harm.

Full implementation of the Convention is at the frontline of defence, against chemicals being acquired and used by non-state actors. From 13 to 20 November 2020, the Secretariat hosted a training on international chemical security legal frameworks, including the role of stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies, chemical industry, and traders. This training provided participants with the tools to analyse gaps in national legal and regulatory frameworks, and to develop approaches to address them. More than 50 participants from States Parties in Asia joined an online course, which will be rolled out in other regions in the coming year.

Effective implementation of the Convention requires leadership by States Parties to embed the Convention into their national legal and administrative systems. Full implementation of the Convention produces tangible benefits, including protecting against the diversion of toxic chemicals, building chemical industry capabilities, and developing chemical industries and technologies. The Secretariat is committed to helping States Parties to take ownership of the Convention, and recognise that these benefits align with their own domestic objectives and priorities. This is a key condition for delivering sustainable results that contribute to positive change.

The Secretariat's capacity-building programmes are based on needs and risk assessments, at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, in order to ensure that they are aligned with the needs and conditions of States Parties. This is essential for effective implementation of the Convention. To assist in this regard, the Secretariat has developed the National Implementation Framework, as a useful tool, to comprehensively implement all provisions of the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Peer-to-peer cooperation also helps States Parties to learn about challenges and solutions to the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, it is important to build relationships of trust, and strengthening networks with relevant stakeholders at the national level.

I am pleased that the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Representatives of Chemical Industry and National Authorities, held online last week, was a success. I encourage National Authorities to continue their efforts to engage with the chemical industry, customs authorities, the scientific community, and other government agencies. It is important that all stakeholders have a shared understanding and knowledge of the Convention and its obligations and benefits. The Secretariat is committed to facilitating cooperation between these stakeholder groups by providing platforms for discussion.

Education and outreach continues to play an essential role in increasing understanding and awareness of the Convention. I encourage National Authorities to use any available opportunity to promote the global ban on chemical weapons, and the need to prevent their re-emergence. In these efforts, I also ask you to promote the work of the OPCW to qualified professionals in your countries.

To succeed in the post-destruction era, we will need to harness the talents of the best and the brightest from all States Parties. This means attracting highly qualified potential candidates from around the world and encouraging them to direct their talents towards the OPCW's noble goal. I urge all States Parties to promote employment at the Secretariat to highly qualified candidates and encourage them to apply for suitable positions.

At present, the OPCW is developing the project of constructing a new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. We will have selected a constructor in January and the construction will start next summer. The project design of the building is complete, we are very close to have the necessary budget and we are respecting the timeline previously established, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centre will include a new laboratory and new premises devoted to international cooperation, knowledge and expertise management, scientific research, etc. It will enhance our chemical analytical and our knowledge management capabilities.

To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 33.3 million have been received from 45 countries, the European Union, and three other donors. A further EUR 200,000 is needed to fully fund the project. I renew my appeal to States Parties that have not contributed yet, to invest in the future of this Organisation by supporting the ChemTech Centre project with voluntary contributions. This project will benefit all States Parties.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive and engaging meeting.
