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**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TO THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(FULL VERSION)**

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Seventh Session of the Executive Council.
2. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the new Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki, the Permanent Representative of Morocco. I am confident that the Council will benefit from his long experience and outstanding diplomatic skills.
3. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez, the former Permanent Representative of El Salvador, for his able leadership of the Council.
4. I wish to express my appreciation to all Members of the Executive Council for your continued goodwill and dedication in meeting and working in this adapted modality, as we enter the second year of the pandemic.
5. I am grateful to all outgoing Members of the Council and I extend a warm welcome to all new Members.
6. During this challenging time of the pandemic, the OPCW remains resilient and continues to deliver on all its mandates. The Secretariat will continue to implement measures for the benefit of the health and safety of the delegations and staff members, until we have more information after the summer. The phased return to the office will take into account the Host Country's COVID-19 measures and the specific needs of the OPCW to guarantee the highest level of safety. Today, I would like to begin this session of the Council by underlining progress in some priority areas.
7. On the Centre for Chemistry and Technology—the ChemTech Centre—I am pleased to share with you some important milestones. On 14 April, the tender for the main construction company was successfully completed. Construction activities on site began in June, with the ground excavation and work on the foundation starting this month.
8. The funding target for the construction of the ChemTech Centre has now also been met, with over EUR 33.65 million contributed or pledged from 48 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I would like to express my appreciation to all the donors, whose contributions have enabled this significant achievement.



9. The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions, which we have started receiving, and which will be devoted to equipment and programmes. The Trust Fund will provide extra assurances for the successful completion of the project, and for international cooperation programmes to be carried out at the Centre as soon as the building is operational. The Secretariat is analysing which activities can be delivered at the ChemTech Centre that will enhance and support full implementation of the Convention. In this regard, I have been undertaking consultations with States Parties and regional groups to hear and incorporate your priorities into the activities to be offered at the Centre. This input is critical to ensuring that a list of well-defined programmes for the Centre is ready as soon as its construction is completed.
10. The ChemTech Centre remains on schedule and on budget. States Parties were provided with a full update of the project through a Note issued on 24 June.
11. Since the pandemic began, the Secretariat has successfully organised all mandated sessions of the policy-making organs. This includes the two parts of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, two sessions of the Executive Council last year, in July and in October, and two this year, in March and now in July, under demanding circumstances. Our common success in this regard is the result of the goodwill and understanding of States Parties, and of the diligent preparatory efforts of the Secretariat staff. The Secretariat continues to develop its technical and organisational capabilities to conduct hybrid or fully online meetings of the OPCW policy-making organs. Technical preparations for the launch of an online meeting system have been completed. This includes the procurement of hardware and software, integration with existing conference systems, and certifying OPCW interpreters in using the system. The Secretariat is planning a simulation testing event for delegations before the next session of the Council, if conditions allow.
12. During the intersessional period, the International Cooperation and Assistance Division continued to implement its activities according to a flexible plan. Since the last session of the Council, 32 online capacity-building events have been conducted, benefitting 1,370 participants from all geographical regions.
13. On 3 June, at the invitation of the presidency of the United Nations Security Council, I briefed the Security Council in an open online format on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. While the OPCW is an organisation independent from the United Nations, I accept, with the highest interest, to contribute to the task of the Security Council. The Secretariat shares monthly reports on this matter with the Executive Council. These reports are also sent to the Security Council, through the United Nations Secretary-General. This was the fourth such briefing I have provided to the Security Council since November 2018. On 24 June, I received a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, Dr Faisal Mekdad, containing comments related to my briefing to the Security Council and mentioning again Syria's wish to cooperate with the Secretariat. This letter, together with my response, was published yesterday on the OPCW Extranet for States Parties' information.
14. During the second part of its Twenty-Fifth Session, on 21 April 2021, the Conference of the States Parties adopted the decision "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic" (C-25/DEC.9, dated 21 April 2021).

15. In paragraph 7 of the decision, the Conference decided to suspend the following rights and privileges of Syria under the Convention:
 - (a) to vote in the Conference and in the Council;
 - (b) to stand for election to the Council; and
 - (c) to hold any office of the Conference, the Council, or any subsidiary organs.
16. In paragraph 8 of the decision, the Conference decided that these rights and privileges will be reinstated by the Conference once the Director-General reports to the Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed the requested measures of paragraph 5 of the decision adopted by the Executive Council in July 2020 (EC-94/DEC.2). Those measures are to:
 - (a) declare to the Secretariat the facilities where the chemical weapons used in the three attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017 were developed, produced, stockpiled, and operationally stored for delivery;
 - (b) declare to the Secretariat all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses, as well as chemical weapons production facilities and other related facilities; and
 - (c) resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile and programme.
17. I wish to underline that all of the mandates concerning the Syrian chemical dossier, given through the Convention and decisions of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties and Executive Council, remain binding on all States Parties as well as on the Secretariat.
18. I further emphasise that the Secretariat's work on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier remains active and ongoing on multiple fronts, in line with our mandates. To keep States Parties fully informed about all developments, a comprehensive in-person briefing on Syria was organised for States Parties on 30 June in two identical presentations, to allow the maximum possible number of delegations to attend, while respecting measures related to COVID-19.
19. On 12 April 2021, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) issued a report on the incident that took place in Saraqib, Syria, on 4 February 2018. This is the IIT's second report, following the first issued in April last year covering three cases.
20. The report on Saraqib reached the conclusion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that on 4 February 2018 a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, under the control of the Tiger Forces, hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals. These conclusions are based on interviews, analyses of samples, a review of the symptomatology, examination of imagery, including satellite images, and extensive consultation of experts. The IIT also obtained a topographic analysis of the area in question, and gas dispersion modelling to corroborate accounts from witnesses and victims. The investigation relied on the relevant Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report, as well as on samples and other material obtained by the Secretariat.

21. Currently, the IIT is investigating five cases and will report on them in due course.
22. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues its efforts to clarify the shortcomings found in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration. I reported the outcomes of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth rounds of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian Arab Republic to the previous session of the Council. On 30 April, I sent a letter to the Syrian National Authority announcing that the twenty-fifth round of consultations was scheduled to take place between 18 May and 1 June. One new issue was recently opened and was meant to be taken up during this next round of consultations. It pertains to the presence of a neat chemical weapons agent found in samples collected in large storage containers in September 2020.
23. On 5 May, the Secretariat followed up its announcement by requesting the necessary and usual issuance of visas for the team members. In the absence of a response, the Secretariat informed the Syrian authorities on 14 May of the postponement of the mission to 28 May. On 26 May, still not having received any response from the Syrian authorities on the issuance of visas, or on the convenience regarding the proposed timing, I decided to postpone the mission until further notice.
24. The Secretariat will continue to seek the next opportunity to deploy the DAT for the Syrian Arab Republic to comply with all of its obligations under the Convention, the decisions of the OPCW policy-making organs, and the resolutions of the Security Council. On this matter, I recall that under the Convention all States Parties are to provide staff from the Secretariat with multiple-entry visas valid for a period of two years.
25. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Council decision adopted in November 2016, the Secretariat conducted the seventh round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) between 8 and 13 November 2020. During this round, the inspections found no substances or activities that are inconsistent with Syria's obligations under the Convention. The conduct of further deployments remains subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.
26. With regard to the detection of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical during the third round of inspections at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC, the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the Secretariat to close this issue.
27. The FFM deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic from 29 March to 13 April 2021 to collect information and conduct interviews regarding an incident in Kafr Zita, Hama, in October 2016. Currently, the FFM is continuing to analyse information collected from different deployments and is preparing for further deployments, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will issue additional reports in due course.
28. In relation to the OPCW Office located at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus—the Command Post—the Secretariat has reminded the Syrian Arab Republic that the inspector present there is replaced every six weeks under a mechanism of rotation. Since 17 April, the Secretariat has been requesting the necessary and usual issuance of visas for the incoming staff member. No response had been received from the Syrian Arab Republic for over three months. I therefore recalled the incumbent officer from Damascus back to The Hague on 21 June, given that she had already served at the OPCW Office in Damascus for more than double the usual six-week term. Her successor was sent to Beirut on 19 June to

await the issuance of a visa there from the Syrian Arab Republic. Given the lack of response, I also recalled this officer back to Headquarters on 3 July. Currently, the OPCW Office in Damascus remains manned only by support staff from UNOPS. Yesterday a note verbale was received announcing that the visa was granted and could be collected at the border crossing with Lebanon. Given the overall context that I have described, I decided to send a letter on 24 June to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of the National Authority, Dr Faisal Mekdad, inviting him to an in-person meeting with me after the summer. I proposed to the Minister that two senior officials be appointed, one by him and one by me, and that they be charged with working on the preparations of the agenda during the coming weeks. The Secretariat will continue to engage with Syria to continue deployments of the DAT, the FFM, and inspections of the SSRC.

29. I will now turn to destruction-related activities.
30. Verification at chemical weapons destruction facilities in the United States of America has continued, thanks to modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site in COVID-19 times. As at 30 June, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of a total of 71,372 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.71%, of a total of 72,304.339 MT.
31. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) at various sites in China. Excavation, recovery, and destruction operations in Haerbaling resumed in May 2021. Activities at other sites remain suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspections related to these activities will take place later in the year when conditions allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
32. The Secretariat remains in close contact with China and Japan regarding the latest developments on these matters. The thirty-fourth trilateral meeting between China, Japan, and the Secretariat was held online on 30 March 2021. The objectives of trilateral meetings are to ensure transparency, to discuss technical and practical issues, to implement projects in accordance with the appropriate verification measures, and to plan for future activities.
33. As at 20 June 2021, around 83,700 items of ACW had been recovered, of which 57,701 items had been reported as destroyed.
34. Since the last session of the Council, the Secretariat conducted three old chemical weapons inspections in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands.
35. As reported in my Note to the Council at this session (EC-97/DG.1), only 84 of the planned 241 Article VI inspections (34%) were completed in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, 241 Article VI inspections are again mandated. To date, 14 of these inspections have been conducted, with the aim of gradually ramping up inspections according to the conditions of the evolving global pandemic.
36. The Secretariat will continue to give priority to inspections of Schedule 1 facilities and initial inspections of Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 plant sites.

37. On 2 July, I presented the biennial Draft Programme and Budget for 2022–2023 to States Parties. This budget represents the first biennial programme and budget for the Organisation following the Conference decision in 2019 (C-24/DEC.11) requesting the Organisation to transition to this form of budget preparation.
38. In the interim period, the Secretariat developed and implemented the internal structures necessary to enable this transition. With a biennial programme and budget, a number of tangible benefits are being gained. These include longer-term planning, increased focus on programme implementation, as well as achieving efficiency in the budget preparation approval process.
39. With regard to the Secretariat's current financial situation, the External Auditor has confirmed that the OPCW has incurred a cash deficit of EUR 1.2 million in 2019. This is mainly due to non-payment of assessed contributions. This cash deficit will have to be addressed by the Conference.
40. Moving forward, as at 30 June 2021, the collection level for 2021 assessed contributions was 56.24%, compared to 62.35% on the same date last year. Notably, cash inflows are again considerably lower than forecast. Should this situation continue, the Working Capital Fund may have to be used within this quarter to maintain operational liquidity. The Secretariat is closely monitoring the Organisation's cash position as well as the impact of the pandemic on programme implementation.
41. I must reiterate the importance for all States Parties of paying your assessed contributions and other reimbursable costs for inspection activities as early as possible. As an example, the total outstanding contributions for the five States Parties with the biggest arrears is more than EUR 31 million, which represents 82% of the total outstanding contributions of more than EUR 37 million.
42. States Parties will continue to be kept informed of the Organisation's cash position through the Secretariat's monthly financial situation reports.
43. I also wish to emphasise that the zero nominal growth policy has generated a situation of continued loss of purchasing power, amounting to more than 20% over the last 10 years, owing to the increase in mandatory costs.
44. In recent years, so-called cash surpluses that are the result of late payments of assessed contributions have arisen and were reallocated by Conference decision to finance special funds covering a number of high-priority programmatic areas. In doing so, States Parties' assessment levels have remained constant.
45. However, the current cash deficit position, coupled with inflationary operating costs year over year, has necessitated an increase in assessed contributions in order to finance the Draft Programme and Budget for 2022–2023.
46. States Parties will have the opportunity to discuss the Draft Programme and Budget during the facilitation process that will start in September.
47. The Fiftieth Session of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF) was held from 1 to 4 June 2021. It covered a number of important areas, including the 2020 Financial Statements, the ChemTech Centre Project, and a review of the financial position of the Organisation for the current year.

48. A decision was adopted during the second part of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference appointing the Comptroller and Auditor General of India as the External Auditor for the period 2021 to 2023. The decision further requests the Council to establish, as early as possible, a working group to come up with a proposal on how to appoint the External Auditor of the OPCW in the future.
49. The Secretariat's human resources enable the effective implementation of our mandates. Retaining and developing knowledge and skills will be critical to succeeding in this evolving security, scientific, and technical landscape.
50. I wish to thank Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia and Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay for facilitating States Parties' discussions on several internal governance topics, including the tenure policy and knowledge management.
51. I have noted the circulation of the revised draft decision on the Organisation's tenure policy. I have been encouraged by the increasing understanding by the States Parties of the practicality of having greater flexibility, for both contract extensions and the re-hiring of former staff members after several years of break in service. This is the way our partner organisations, the IAEA and the CTBTO, operate, while both retaining their non-career character. The multiple presentations and provision of information by the Secretariat have been instrumental in this respect. At the same time, I have registered the connections that have been made between this process and our efforts to achieve gender balance and greater geographical diversity at the Secretariat. I wish to emphasise that the possible adaptations to the tenure policy are an instrument aimed at achieving greater efficiency for the Secretariat, not a vehicle for promoting gender or geographical diversity of staff. Regarding the latter, I can assure States Parties of my continued and unwavering commitment, as demonstrated by the numerous adaptations to our advertising and recruitment policies.
52. Building capacity to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, including their use by non-State actors, continues to be an important area of focus.
53. In this regard, the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism met virtually on 5 July, under the Chairpersonship of Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa.
54. During the meeting, States Parties learned about training possibilities the Secretariat offers to strengthen their legislative and regulatory frameworks for chemical security.
55. The Organisation has also undertaken projects to respond to the dual challenges of increasing cybersecurity threats and remote working, in order to keep the Secretariat connected and secure. We continue to invest in cybersecurity assurance through financial, training, and policy improvement means.
56. Overall, the Organisation continues to face a high number of sophisticated and targeted cyberattacks. It is critical to continue with efforts to ensure that OPCW operations are protected and secure. I recall the establishment of a Special Fund for Security and Business Continuity in 2020, and am pleased to share that during the intersessional period a further contribution agreement of EUR 500,000 was signed with France. I also welcome the announcement by the European Union of its intention to contribute a further EUR 2.1 million. This will enhance the capabilities that serve as an important foundation of the Organisation's digital resilience, and I continue to invite others to contribute.

57. The Secretariat has started looking into its environmental footprint, and will seek ways to reduce it through a zero-emissions building.
58. I am pleased to report that the new extranet platform is ready to be launched. Delegations will be invited to test the platform following this session of the Council. It will be available to all States Parties on 1 August 2021.
59. There were changes in the Senior Management during the intersessional period.
60. I am pleased to take this opportunity to warmly welcome to the Secretariat our newly appointed Legal Adviser, Ms Hafida Lahiouel.
61. At the same time, we bid farewell to Mr Kai Chen, the outgoing Director of our External Relations Division. On behalf of the Secretariat, I would like to thank him for his dedicated service and convey to him our best wishes.
62. There have been many changes in my now three years at the helm of the OPCW. During this period, the Organisation has adapted and evolved to meet the challenges of a new security environment. We have continued to deliver results with limited resources. The global pandemic further underscored the Secretariat's agility to adapt to unprecedented and unpredictable circumstances.
63. Looking to the future, we need to ensure that the Organisation remains well equipped to address all types of chemical weapons threats, including those from non-State actors, and to further develop the capacities of its Member States to counter these threats at the national level. We will sharpen our focus on prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons in support of global security.
64. The ChemTech Centre will play an important role in this regard, as it will enable us to keep pace with advances in science and technology. The Centre will embody the commitment of States Parties to the Convention and be an unparalleled knowledge repository for chemical weapons disarmament, and the peaceful and authorised use of chemistry.
65. States Parties can rely on the Secretariat's dedication and on my personal commitment to a strong and effective OPCW in the years ahead.

Chemical demilitarisation and verification

Status of destruction of declared stockpiles

United States of America

66. The United States of America has two remaining chemical destruction facility sites: the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (PCAPP) in Colorado, and the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) in Kentucky.
67. In April, the Secretariat conducted a visit to the BGCAPP facility in order to familiarise itself with modifications made to the destruction process and to adjust its monitoring procedures. Accordingly, amendments and modifications have been made to the agreed detailed plan for verification and the facility agreement. These changes have been submitted to the Council for its consideration (EC-97/DEC/CRP.2 and EC-97/DEC/CRP.3, both dated 8 June 2021).

68. The BGCAPP main plant completed the destruction of VX-filled projectiles in May and entered a period of planned inactivity to allow preparation for the next destruction campaign.
69. The BGCAPP Static Detonation Chamber (SDC) is currently processing HD-filled projectiles. In May, the Secretariat verified the sampling and analysis of neat agent from the munitions being destroyed.
70. Destruction activities are ongoing at the PCAPP facility. Three SDCs are currently undergoing systemisation and will be used to augment destruction operations.
71. As to the remaining stockpile, as at 30 June 2021 the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,837 MT, or 96.64% of its Category 1 chemical weapons. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 3.36% of its stockpile no later than 2023.
72. The Secretariat has maintained its verification activities at the aforementioned chemical weapons destruction facilities (in accordance with Notes EC-94/S/1, EC-94/S/2, EC-94/S/3, and EC-94/S/4, all dated 6 April 2020). Cooperation between the United States of America and the Secretariat has ensured uninterrupted verification by the Secretariat of these activities during the intersessional period under modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.

Abandoned chemical weapons

73. As at 20 June, around 83,700 items of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China had been recovered, of which 57,701 ACWs had been reported as destroyed.

Declarations

74. Since the last session of the Council, there have been no changes with regard to the submission of initial declarations, with only one State Party, Tonga, yet to submit declarations under Articles III and VI of the Convention.
75. A status report on the timely submission of annual declarations was provided to States Parties for the period from 1 January to 31 May 2021 (EC-97/DG.11, dated 15 June 2021) in advance of this session of the Council.
76. A presentation will be provided during this session of the Council on amendments and correspondence received by the Secretariat during the intersessional period regarding Article III declarations.

Article VI inspections

77. The Secretariat continues to consult with National Authorities in order to identify solutions that would maximise the number of Article VI inspections to be carried out in 2021.
78. The Secretariat stands ready to update States Parties on Article VI verification efforts at the next regular session of the Council, in October 2021.

Verification Information System

79. The Secretariat continued to prepare the modernisation of the Verification Information System (VIS) during the intersessional period. The software development efforts are planned to start in September. This endeavour will allow the alignment of the VIS platform with existing modern technology systems.

Inspector training

80. During the intersessional period, inspectors continued to receive training through the growing OPCW online training catalogue.
81. On 6 April, 57 inspectors attended an online mandatory inspector refresher training course.
82. On 12 and 13 April, 71 Secretariat staff members attended the second part of the “Technical Secretariat Preparedness for Challenge Inspections” online classroom training, the first part of which had been held on 16 and 17 February 2021.
83. From 25 to 30 April, 28 inspectors took part in a week-long online training course on open-source investigation methods, organised by the Institute for International Criminal Investigations, the Netherlands.
84. On 3 and 4 May, two consecutive refresher sessions of the Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) online training were held, with the support and cooperation of the United States of America. These courses resulted in the recertification of 44 inspectors.
85. From 14 to 25 June, an initial training course on toxic chemicals for the six new inspectors from Group S, as well as two refresher sessions for inspectors, were conducted at the Training and Testing Centre of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection, Zemianske Kostol’any, Slovakia.
86. From 28 June to 2 July, 25 Secretariat staff members attended an online Schedule 1 chemistry course.
87. I would like to thank the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the United States of America for supporting the Secretariat’s training for inspectors during the intersessional period.

Knowledge management

88. During the intersessional period, knowledge management processes were enhanced through the further development and implementation of specialised knowledge transfer and sharing mechanisms, as well as tools to capture and share feedback and lessons learned.

OPCW Laboratory

89. The Forty-Eighth OPCW Proficiency Test was finalised in March. The preliminary results of the evaluation of the Forty-Ninth OPCW Proficiency Test and the Sixth OPCW Biomedical Proficiency Test are in preparation.

90. The network of designated laboratories consists of 28 laboratories from 20 States Parties. Twenty-three laboratories from 20 States Parties are designated for environmental sample analysis, and 18 laboratories from 13 States Parties are designated for biomedical sample analysis. Currently, 11 laboratories have technical arrangements in place in order to receive authentic environmental samples. Similarly, 10 laboratories have technical arrangements in place in order to receive authentic biomedical samples. The OPCW is therefore able to draw on the expertise of approximately half of the designated laboratories for environmental samples and/or biomedical samples. Such technical arrangements are necessary to allow the undertaking of off-site analysis of samples. I therefore encourage States Parties to assist their laboratories in completing such technical agreements.
91. In April, the Twelfth Chemical Weapons Convention Chemical Analysis Competency Test was started and is currently ongoing. Nine laboratories from seven States Parties are participating in this test.
92. The OPCW Laboratory continues to provide training to Secretariat staff, as well as external participants, by means of online presentations.
93. States Parties were informed that the latest release of the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD), version 23_2021, is now available on DVD and USB flash drives through a Note issued in advance of this session of the Council (S/1962/2021, dated 8 June). The fifty-first meeting of the Validation Group meeting was held remotely on 31 March, with 17 participants in attendance. Thirty-eight new data sets were evaluated.

International cooperation and assistance

94. The Secretariat is continually improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of its online learning opportunities while closely monitoring the evolving operating conditions, with a view to resuming face-to-face training events when possible.
95. I would like to acknowledge with great appreciation all in-kind and financial support provided by donors and partners to support the OPCW's international cooperation and assistance activities and projects.

Implementation support

96. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat held eight events for 291 participants from all regions in support of national implementation of the Convention.
97. The Secretariat also conducted four online regional meetings of National Authorities, which provided Member States with an opportunity to discuss implementation of the Convention and their technical-assistance and capacity-building needs and priorities.
98. From 1 March to 15 April, a training course on fulfilling declarations and inspections obligations under Article VI of the Convention was organised online. Fifty-two participants from 29 States Parties representing all regional groups successfully completed the course. The course included self-paced learning and two live interactive sessions, on declarations and industry inspections, respectively.

99. A general training course on the Convention for the personnel of National Authorities and relevant stakeholders was held online from 19 to 22 April. Sixty-seven participants from 41 Member States attended the course.
100. From 19 to 22 April, the Secretariat held an online training course on legislative and regulatory issues on chemical security. Forty-nine representatives from 12 African States Parties participated in the event. The course was aimed at enhancing the capacities of participants from States Parties in Africa to analyse their respective national legal and regulatory frameworks on chemical security, identify gaps and potential means to address them, and discuss approaches to developing appropriate chemical security measures. Participants completed a set of training modules, provided information on their national legal frameworks on chemical security, and attended an interactive online session.
101. From 25 to 27 May, a training course for representatives of customs training institutions was held online in cooperation with the World Customs Organization (WCO). Sixty-three participants from 40 States Parties attended the course, which comprised online modules, trainer and participant presentations, and practical exercises. Participants gained insight into the Convention's transfer provisions, discussed transfer scenarios with experts from the OPCW and the WCO, identified best practices in exercising effective control over trade in toxic chemicals, and shared experiences in implementing national training programmes for the enforcement of trade controls. Participants also discussed various aspects of cross-border trade control, including licensing, risk management, and physical inspection of chemicals, as well as causes of discrepancies in reporting imports and exports of scheduled chemicals.
102. On 2 and 3 June, the Twenty-First Regional Meeting of National Authorities for States Parties in Eastern Europe was held online. Twenty-six representatives from 20 Member States exchanged views on the implementation of the Convention, including best practices and future needs and priorities. Representatives also received updates from the Secretariat on recent developments concerning the implementation of Articles VI, VII, and X.
103. On 3 June, the Secretariat held a formal online consultation with Togo on the status of its draft law implementing the Convention. Togolese delegates provided updates on progress made since their participation in the Secretariat's Influential Visitors Programme in 2019 and discussed ongoing challenges in light of operational restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat affirmed its readiness to continue to support the National Authority's efforts in this regard. Four Togolese delegates attended the consultation.
104. From 8 to 10 June, the Twenty-Second Regional Meeting of National Authorities from the Latin America and the Caribbean region (GRULAC) was held online. Fifty-three representatives from 22 Member States participated in the meeting and discussed issues related to national implementation, including challenges in adopting implementing legislation, building laboratory capacities, promoting chemical security, resolving transfer discrepancies, and strengthening education and outreach.
105. From 15 to 17 June, the Nineteenth Regional Meeting of National Authorities from the Africa region was held online. Forty-eight representatives from 24 Member States participated in the meeting, which focused on issues relating to the verification regime,

national implementing legislation, assistance and protection, chemical security, and the capacities of chemical laboratories. National Authority representatives were briefed on capacity-building programmes, tools, and projects developed by the Technical Secretariat to assist Member States in complying with their obligations under the Convention and learned about progress in the implementation of the Africa Programme.

106. From 22 to 24 June, the Nineteenth Regional Meeting of National Authorities from the Asia region was held online. Fifty-four representatives from 28 Member States in the Asia region participated in the three-day meeting. The meeting agenda covered a range of issues ranging from updates on OPCW activities, regional status of implementation of the Convention, Article VI verification issues, and the status of the OPCW's ChemTech Centre project. Member States' representatives shared their experiences in implementing the Convention over the past year, which encouraged lively interactions and discussions among the participants.

Assistance and protection

107. In the area of assistance and protection, 13 training and other capacity-building activities took place during the intersessional period. These events supported the development of chemical emergency response knowledge for 759 experts and stakeholders from all regional groups.
108. A record 184 emergency responders from 41 States Parties from all regions participated in an online assistance and protection course from 15 to 19 March. Participants enhanced their knowledge of detection, sampling, and identification of chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals. The course was organised in partnership with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation of Pakistan.
109. From 12 to 16 April, an online basic course was held on the use of the Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders (WISER) and the Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) in response to incidents involving chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals for first responders from States Parties in the GRULAC region. Forty-five representatives from 10 GRULAC Member States participated. These chemical emergency management tools provide information to assist in the evaluation of incidents, as well as guidance on hazardous substances, protective distance plotting, and containment.
110. The Secretariat organised two further courses on WISER and ERG with the participation of 18 first responders from seven States Parties from the Economic Community of West African States (on 28 and 29 April) and 25 first responders from 11 States Parties from Eastern Europe (on 18 and 19 May). The participants enhanced their skills on how to accurately characterise and rapidly contain incidents involving hazardous chemicals. The courses were conducted in partnership with the Population Protection Institute of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic.
111. On 20 April, the Secretariat supported the Master of Science programme at the London Policing College in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The topics covered for the 12 students included the history of the Chemical Weapons Convention and chemical warfare, as well as the conduct of operations in a contaminated environment.

112. From 10 to 14 May, a second edition of the online basic course on decontamination against chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals for first responders from States Parties in the GRULAC region was delivered with the technical assistance of the Special Risks Brigade of the Argentine Federal Police. Eighty-three first responders participated from 13 States Parties in the GRULAC region.
113. From 17 to 19 May, an online workshop was held for first responders and other members of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) national defence systems in the GRULAC region to advance their operational resilience in countering chemical threats. The workshop was attended by 154 military and civilian professionals from 12 States Parties, representing a range of response systems, including civil defence, fire departments, police, and CBRN defence military units.
114. On 19 May, the Secretariat organised a special session on Article X assistance and cooperation for States Parties in Southeastern Europe, in partnership with the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre – Centre for Security Cooperation, based in Croatia. The meeting facilitated a discussion on national needs in terms of chemical emergency preparedness. This session, attended by 10 representatives from four States Parties, was a first step in the creation of a subregional assistance plan to enhance preparedness and response capabilities against chemical attacks and incidents involving toxic industrial chemicals.
115. From 25 to 27 May, the Secretariat, with support from the International Rescuers Training Centre based in Belarus, launched a new modular online training programme for Russian-speaking first responders. Seventy-eight professionals from 11 States Parties participated in the first training module, which focused on personal protection equipment and skills in chemical emergency response.
116. Also from 25 to 27 May, the Secretariat organised a virtual course on incident response operations and sampling for States Parties belonging to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Twenty-nine experts from four African States Parties reinforced their theoretical skills and knowledge on management of a chemical incident and reconnaissance operations, as well as methods to control the site of incident. The course was conducted in partnership with the Population Protection Institute of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic.
117. On 1 June, the Secretariat presented a new Online Self-Assessment Tool (OSAT) to States Parties in the Southern African Development Community. This pilot project will help National Authorities to assess the risks posed by hazardous chemicals, audit existing response capacities, and identify necessary improvement measures, including those that the Secretariat may support through its programmes. Twenty-one representatives from seven African States Parties assessed the OSAT design and considered the factors necessary to assess chemical risk, the presence and effectiveness of controls to mitigate those risks, the comprehensiveness of chemical emergency management policy, and the institutional capacity of relevant agencies to perform their roles during a chemical incident.
118. From 14 to 16 June, the Secretariat supported the National Authority of Bangladesh in conducting a national basic assistance and protection course for responders (“BAPCoR-2”). Twenty-eight national experts discussed Article X issues, national obligations, and capacity-building activities implemented by the Technical Secretariat.

119. From 21 to 25 June, the Secretariat delivered an online course on emergency response involving chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals for first responders of States Parties in the GRULAC region. Seventy-two professionals representing 11 States Parties benefited from this training, which received technical support from the Hazardous Materials Unit of the Costa Rica Fire Brigade.

International cooperation

120. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat delivered 11 events in support of international cooperation for the peaceful use of chemistry, benefiting some 320 participants from all regional groups.
121. On 29 June, the “Guidelines for Chemical Safety and Security for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to Foster the Peaceful Uses of Chemistry” were published on the OPCW website. These non-binding guidelines were developed by a panel of experts in coordination with the Secretariat. This document, the first of its kind, includes a series of best practices in this field, providing a reference for SMEs implementing chemical safety and security measures.

Integrated chemicals management

122. On 1 April, the Secretariat organised the online forum “New Norms for the OPCW Capacity-Building Programme After the COVID-19 Pandemic”. The forum was attended by 37 participants from 13 African States Parties. Lessons learned and best practices regarding online capacity-building programmes were shared, and both needs and gaps were identified, in particular with regard to chemical safety and security management following the COVID-19 pandemic.
123. From 18 May to 1 June, an online intersessional course of the Associate Programme was organised. Twenty-seven participants from 18 States Parties received practical advice about the implementation of the Convention and chemical industry best practices, including chemical safety and security management.
124. From 8 to 10 June, the Secretariat organised a workshop on general aspects of chemical safety and security in laboratories”. The 45 participants attending the workshop represented governmental, chemical industry, academic, research, and policy-making institutions from 17 States Parties. The workshop focused on best practices and knowledge about hazardous chemicals and related risk assessment, personal protection equipment, emergency management, environmental impact, and sustainability.
125. From 14 to 18 June, the Secretariat organised a workshop entitled “Best Practices to Develop the Responsible Care[®] Programme for the Chemical Industry”. The workshop provided an update on the Responsible Care[®] programme and focused on sustainability, safety, and security in chemical industries. The event was held for environmental health and safety managers, technologists, and representatives of chemical industry associations and governmental organisations from Russian-speaking States Parties. Twenty participants from seven States Parties enhanced their knowledge about environmental protection and environmental technologies, labelling of chemicals, integrated systems for chemical safety and security management, occupational medicine, and health protection.

126. On 2 July, the Secretariat organised an online training programme on chemical safety and security management for African Member States. The programme focused on the human reliability assessment and development of national action plans towards the prevention of chemical accidents and incidents. More than 30 participants from African States Parties attended the event, representing government agencies, academia, chemical industries, and the defence sector.

Enhancing laboratory capabilities

127. Four capacity-building events were delivered within the framework of the project on assessing and enhancing the capacity of analytical laboratories in African and GRULAC Member States. I thank the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for providing funding for this project.
128. From 11 to 25 March, the Secretariat organised an online training course on proficiency testing for States Parties in the GRULAC region. Twelve participants from Brazil and Chile attended the course. The training focused on strategies and procedures to pass OPCW proficiency tests. From 15 to 19 March, the Secretariat organised an online training course on proficiency testing with the same aim for African States Parties. Seventeen participants from Kenya and Nigeria attended the course.
129. On 31 March, the Secretariat organised a coaching seminar for the Brazilian Ministry of Defence's Institute for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence laboratory. The seminar provided guidance for future participation in the OPCW's testing schemes.
130. On 8 April, the Secretariat organised an online workshop to summarise and assess progress achieved in the project on assessing and enhancing capacity of analytical laboratories from African and GRULAC Member States and to discuss the way forward in the third phase of the project, from 2021 to 2022. The workshop was attended by 18 participants from Brazil, Chile, Finland, Germany, Kenya, Nigeria, Spain, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
131. Under the Equipment Exchange Programme, in April the Secretariat facilitated the donation of a gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer between a laboratory in Germany and the National Authority of the Sudan.

Promoting chemical knowledge

132. On 1 July, the Secretariat held the fifth edition of the Symposium on Women in Chemistry online. The symposium provided a forum to promote women's contribution to the implementation of the Convention and highlight opportunities for women to benefit from the OPCW's capacity-building programmes. The symposium was attended by more than 50 participants from around the world.
133. The Fellowship Programme has resumed, with five fellowships scheduled to commence between July and December of 2021, involving the participation of fellows from Cuba (to be hosted in Italy), Jordan (to be hosted in France), Serbia and Uganda (both to be hosted in Finland), and Zimbabwe (to be hosted in Switzerland).

134. During the reporting period, three new projects (one in Argentina and two in Malaysia) were initiated under the Programme for the Support of Research Projects. As at 30 June, there were 23 research projects ongoing under this programme that are directly funded by the OPCW.

Africa Programme

135. During the intersessional period, 15 of the capacity-building events organised by the Secretariat accommodated over 260 participants from 30 African Member States. These events included seven organised exclusively for Africa.
136. Training areas included improving the national implementation of the Convention, enhancing the effectiveness of National Authorities, improving control over cross-border transfers of scheduled chemicals, developing assistance and protection capabilities against chemical incidents and attacks, providing education on chemical safety and security management, and upgrading laboratory competencies across the continent.
137. The Secretariat is currently processing the sponsorship of five fellowships of African scientists and four African research projects. In addition, eight African research projects are being co-funded with the International Foundation for Science.
138. The Secretariat has continued, during the reporting period, to strengthen collaboration with a wide range of international and regional organisations, with a view to enhancing synergies and conducting joint capacity-building projects under the Africa Programme.
139. In this context, the Secretariat maintained contacts with the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Commission of the African Union, with a view to reactivating the bilateral cooperation along the lines of the action plan proposed by the Secretariat last December.
140. In addition, a knowledge-sharing meeting on the Africa Programme was held on 13 April with the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the Biological Weapons Convention and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, at their request, in the framework of the potential development and coordination, by the ISU, of a “signature initiative” on biosecurity in Africa.
141. The Secretariat continues to seek voluntary contributions to support the Africa Programme and increase its impact. I would like to acknowledge with great appreciation the financial and in-kind support being provided to the fifth phase of the Programme by the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the European Union.
142. During the reporting period, two proposals for special projects, namely, “CHEMEX Africa: Building Chemical Incident Response Capacity Under the OPCW Africa Programme” and “Peer-to-Peer Training for African Customs Training Institutions”, were submitted for funding consideration to the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. The Secretariat will keep the Council abreast of the outcome of the deliberations on these projects and will continue the resource mobilisation for the other special projects.
143. On 25 June, the Steering Committee of the Africa Programme reviewed recent developments in the Programme and commended the progress achieved in its implementation.

Scientific Advisory Board

144. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) held its Thirty-Second Session online from 15 to 17 June. In addition, the SAB's Temporary Working Group on the analysis of biotoxins met virtually for its first meeting on 3 and 6 May 2021, and for its second meeting on 21 and 23 June 2021. A summary of the first meeting of the Temporary Working Group has been issued (SAB-32/WP.1, dated 6 May 2021).
145. The Secretariat is seeking the nomination of esteemed scientists and technical experts to fill six openings on the Board, with terms commencing on 1 January 2022. The Secretariat is especially seeking nominations of qualified female candidates. A Note on the subject has been provided to States Parties (S/1927/2021, dated 26 January 2021).
146. I continue to encourage all States Parties to contribute to the trust fund for the Scientific Advisory Board, which supports the important work of the SAB.

Administrative and financial matters

147. The External Auditor of the OPCW, the National Audit Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, completed its mandate with the audit of the OPCW 2020 Financial Statements and the issuance of its audit report, including an unqualified audit opinion. The full Financial Statements for 2020, the report of the External Auditor, and the accompanying audit opinion will be published as an official document for consideration by the Council at its Ninety-Eighth Session.

Human resources management

148. During the reporting period, the Secretariat launched an interactive performance management dashboard. This tool will support efficient effective human resources management across the talent management cycle (recruitment, training and development, and performance management).
149. As part of the approach to performance management, ongoing training for managers and staff has been organised to further enhance a culture of constructive and continual feedback and dialogue in the Organisation.

External relations

150. On 1 and 2 July, I conducted an official visit to Madrid, Spain, during which I had an audience with His Majesty, King Felipe VI, and met with H.E. Ms Cristina Gallach Figueras, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and for Ibero-America and the Caribbean.
151. During the intersessional period, I received H.E. Mr Mohsen Baharvand, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, (on 20 April). I also met virtually with H.E. Mr Abdulla Bin Faisal Bin Jabur Al Doseri, Assistant Foreign Minister of Bahrain and President of the National Committee on the Prohibition of Development, Production, Stockpiling or Use of Chemical Weapons and the Destruction of Such Weapons (on 9 June). I subsequently held virtual meetings with the Honourable Phil Twyford, Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control of New Zealand (on 23 June), H.E. Mr Simon Coveney, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence of Ireland, (on 29 June) and H.E. Baroness Annabel MacNicoll Goldie DL, Minister of State for Defence of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (on 30 June).

152. During the same period, the OPCW welcomed 11 new Permanent Representatives who have presented their credentials from Colombia, El Salvador, India, Nigeria, North Macedonia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand, Tunisia, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

T.M.C. Asser Institute

153. Applications are now open for the twelfth edition of the T.M.C. Asser Institute's Programme on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which will take place in a fully online format from 27 September to 1 October 2021. I encourage States Parties to promote this important event as an opportunity to build expertise in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation among early- and mid-career professionals. The OPCW, with the support of funds from the European Union, is offering several competitive scholarships to representatives of civil society interested in strengthening their understanding of these issues.

Virtual visits

154. The Secretariat has conducted 22 virtual visits during the intersessional period for a diverse range of groups from the Western Europe and Other States, Eastern Europe, GRULAC, and Asia and the Pacific regions. This outreach activity offers the general public a unique opportunity to learn about the Convention and the work of the OPCW, and is appropriate for educators and students at university level and higher, government officials, civil society representatives, and scientists, amongst others. Details about the visit format, including an online booking form, are available on the OPCW website.

International Open Day

155. On 19 September, the OPCW will take part in the International Open Day, an annual outreach initiative of the Municipality of The Hague involving the participation of international organisations in the city. The event will be held online for the second consecutive year. The Secretariat will present its expanding range of digital outreach material to raise awareness about the Organisation and its 193 Member States' work to eliminate chemical weapons.

Registration by non-governmental organisations for the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties

156. Registration for the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) opened on 17 June. Applications for accreditation to the Conference session will be reviewed by the General Committee of the Conference, which will also consider the modalities of NGO participation in light of any COVID-19-related restrictions.