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

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council.
2. At the outset, I would like to thank you Mr Chairperson, dear Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki, for the dedication, vision, and generosity you demonstrate in your task guiding this Council.
3. During this challenging time of the pandemic, the OPCW remains resilient and continues to deliver on all its mandates.
4. Based on the guidance of the Host Country's authorities and the recommendation of the Secretariat's COVID-19 Task Force, on 27 September the Secretariat began a phased return to the office. This operating posture will continue to evolve, taking into account the Host Country's COVID-19 measures, as well as the specific needs of the OPCW, to guarantee the highest level of safety.
5. Since the pandemic began, the Secretariat has successfully organised five sessions of the Executive Council and one session of the Conference of the States Parties (split into two parts) under special modalities to guarantee your protection.
6. The Secretariat continues to develop its technical and organisational capabilities to conduct hybrid and online meetings. On 21 September 2021, the Secretariat successfully conducted an internal simulation test of a fully online Executive Council session. Technical features were tested, including simultaneous interpretation in all six official languages, active participation from both in-room and remote participants, and voting procedures. The Secretariat is now fine-tuning the platform and exploring other available features with the aim of conducting a simulation with delegations in the coming months.
7. In keeping with usual practice, the Programme and Budget has been a major area of focus during this post-summer intersessional period. The Secretariat has provided further details and information to States Parties during the informal consultations, when requested. I would like to thank the co-facilitators, Mr Jerzy Gierasimiuk, from the Permanent Representation of Poland, and Mr Matteo Fachinotti, from the Permanent Representation of Switzerland, for their dedicated efforts.



8. I commend the work of the budget co-facilitators and States Parties for the very important progress achieved in developing a revised 2022–2023 draft biennium Programme and Budget proposal and draft decision that I hope will enjoy the sustained support of all stakeholders. If approved this will be the first-ever biennium budget for the Organisation. It is structured to ensure that the OPCW remains fit for the future, as we need to continue to deliver on the vital mandates assigned to the Organisation by the Convention and subsequent decisions of the Conference and the Executive Council.
9. I acknowledge the work undertaken by States Parties in the context of the facilitation on governance issues, focusing on options for possible limited flexibilities to the OPCW's tenure policy. I wish to commend the intense engagements of the co-facilitators, Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus from Australia and Ambassador Laura Dupuy from Uruguay. You both have been exemplary, as you have demonstrated your high skills, keen interest, and professionalism. It would be useful for States Parties to agree to measures that will ensure that the Secretariat continues to perform activities efficiently. This will benefit States Parties in the implementation of the Convention and the decisions of the policy-making organs.
10. Turning to the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons dossier, the Secretariat is continuing its mandated activities and its engagement with the Syrian authorities. The Secretariat's activities have been impacted by delays in responses from the Syrian National Authority to correspondence regarding planned deployments, and the issuance of entry visas. As a result, the Secretariat has not deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic since April of this year.
11. In relation to the OPCW Office in Damascus—the so-called Command Post—since April the Secretariat has been unable to maintain its continuous presence because of the delays in responses from Syria on visa requests for rotating officers. As a consequence, the Office was left without OPCW personnel on two occasions, for a total of three months, in two periods between April and September. The OPCW Command Post is essential for the Secretariat. It is instrumental to liaise effectively with the Syrian Authorities and with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), in planning the deployments of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), to ensure that they can be conducted in a safe, secure, and efficient manner. Those delays and gaps in OPCW presence at the Command Post in Damascus have negatively affected the Secretariat's planning.
12. Since April 2021, the Secretariat has been reaching out to the Syrian National Authority to schedule the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the DAT in Damascus. The Secretariat had initially proposed to conduct this mission from 18 May to 1 June 2021. The Syrian side provided its first response to these communications on 16 August 2021, when it confirmed its readiness to hold the consultations from 12 to 27 October 2021. At the same time, the Syrian Arab Republic informed the Secretariat that it had not approved entry visas for all members of the DAT for the upcoming deployment, and confirmed this refusal in subsequent correspondence. I wish to recall here that the DAT expert whose visa request has been denied has deployed to Syria over 20 times in the past seven years.

13. I wish to underline the general obligation of all States Parties, including the Syrian Arab Republic, to cooperate with the Organisation and provide assistance to the Secretariat, as contained in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. Syria is required by the Convention, decisions of the OPCW, and United Nations Security Council resolutions to accept and provide immediate and unfettered access to the personnel designated by the Secretariat of the OPCW. After recalling these elements, I informed the Syrian National Authority that, until visas for all members of the team have been issued, the Secretariat would not deploy the DAT.
14. As an alternative, the Syrian side has been invited to send a delegation to the OPCW Headquarters in The Hague for a limited three- to four-day meeting with the DAT, in the second half of October 2021. Yet, such a meeting cannot replace full-fledged deployments. Indeed, essential activities planned to be conducted in the territory of this country during the twenty-fifth round of consultations, namely interviews with persons related to several outstanding issues, visits to sites, collection of samples, and access to documents, will not be possible in The Hague.
15. The Secretariat will continue to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic clarifies the shortcomings identified in its initial declaration. It will also continue to ensure that Syria complies with all of its obligations under the Convention, the decisions of the OPCW policy-making organs, and the resolutions of the Security Council.
16. On 9 July 2021, the Syrian National Authority sent a note verbale reporting that a military installation that housed a declared former chemical weapons production facility had been attacked on 8 June 2021. This facility is related to an issue that was recently opened by the DAT. The Syrian National Authority additionally reported the destruction in the attack of two chlorine cylinders related to the chemical weapons attack that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018.
17. The Secretariat replied on 15 July 2021 and requested the National Authority to provide all relevant information regarding the damage caused to the declared site and about the unauthorised movement of the two cylinders, and any remains of their destruction. Indeed, the Secretariat had inspected in November 2020 the cylinders at another declared site approximately 60 km from the location at which they were reportedly destroyed on 8 June 2021. The Secretariat additionally recalled that it had previously advised Syria that it was not to open, move, or alter the cylinders in any way without seeking the prior written consent of the Secretariat. The Syrian National Authority did not notify the Secretariat that the cylinders had been moved to a new location until it reported their destruction. As of this date, the Secretariat has not received a response to this request.
18. The FFM is continuing its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic and other States Parties with regard to a variety of incidents in Syria and is planning upcoming deployments.
19. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is continuing its investigations in accordance with the Note by the Secretariat released prior to the Council Session of July 2019, and will issue further reports in due course.

20. As I reported at the last session of the Council, I have invited Mr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Syria, to an in-person meeting. Both parties have appointed officials in charge of the preparations, including the determination of the date, location, agenda, and composition of the delegations. The Secretariat will keep the Council informed of further developments on these matters.
21. At this time, I wish to state that the aforementioned lack of responsiveness from the Syrian National Authority to the Secretariat's correspondence, combined with refusals to issue visas to OPCW personnel, are hampering the Secretariat to carry out its mandated work.
22. The extension of the Tripartite Agreement between the OPCW, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and the Syrian Arab Republic was valid until 30 September 2021. On 7 September 2021, the parties finalised a three-month extension to the Agreement, which will cover the period from 1 October up to 31 December 2021. I recall that extensions of such limited duration significantly impact the Secretariat's ability to plan and conduct the activities and deployments, which planning is normally done on a yearly basis. The Secretariat will start in November the preparations for the next extension of the Tripartite Agreement.
23. In compliance with the decision adopted by the Conference at its Fourth Special Session in June 2018, the Secretariat remains prepared to assist States Parties on matters related to technical expertise to identify, if requested by a State Party, those who were perpetrators, organisers, sponsors, or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons. In this respect, the Secretariat recently held an internal meeting in which investigative and forensic knowledge and applicable experiences were shared among the Secretariat's experts.
24. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism met on 4 October 2021, chaired by Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa. The Secretariat presented its activities in industrial outreach for chemical security, and the recently launched Indicative Guidelines for Chemical Safety and Security in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. In addition, a representative of the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) expert community briefed the Working Group on the contribution of the chemical industry, academia, and other external stakeholders to the development of the guidelines.
25. By 4 October, a total of 113, or 59%, of the States Parties had registered for Catalyst. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the States Parties to liaise with their capitals or National Authorities and to submit the applications at their earliest possibility to ensure continued access to documents.
26. In the area of international cooperation and assistance, the Secretariat continued to deliver on its mandate in a manner adapted to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the last session of the Council in July, 14 capacity-building events have been conducted online, benefitting 676 participants from all geographical regions. The Secretariat continues to closely monitor the evolving operating conditions, with a view to resuming face-to-face training events as soon as the circumstances permit.
27. I will now turn to destruction-related activities.

28. 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 September 2021, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of a total of 71,475.762 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.85%, of a total of 72,304.342 MT.
29. The destruction of the chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China is scheduled to continue, based on the agreed destruction plan. 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 be rescheduled and take place, if conditions allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties. As at 30 September 2021, around 83,700 items of abandoned chemical weapons had been recovered, of which 57,701 items had been reported as destroyed.
30. Since the last session of the Council, the Secretariat conducted two old chemical weapons inspections, in Latvia and in Italy.
31. This year, 241 Article VI inspections to the chemical industry are again mandated. Inspections have been ramping up as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. The Secretariat now expects to complete 80 inspections by the end of the year, and will continue to give priority to inspections of Schedule 1 facilities and initial inspections of Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 plant sites.
32. During the intersessional period, several outreach activities were conducted to increase awareness among our stakeholders about the importance of the OPCW's mandate.
33. On 17 September 2021, delegates from over 90 States Parties took part in the OPCW's induction workshop. This annual event provides newly arrived diplomats with an overview of all areas of the OPCW's work and provides a platform for engaging with the Secretariat's senior management.
34. On 24 September 2021, the Secretariat hosted a seminar for the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme. This annual programme aims to help officials from United Nations Member States to build their expertise in disarmament and non-proliferation issues.
35. The twelfth edition of the Hague-based T.M.C. Asser Institute's training programme on disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was held online from 27 September to 1 October 2021. Forty-eight young and mid-career professionals from 27 States Parties participated in the programme and developed their knowledge of the diplomatic, legal, and technical aspects of disarmament and non-proliferation. I delivered opening remarks and responded to questions from the participants, as the Director-General traditionally does every year. The OPCW provided scholarships to 12 participants from civil society, with funds made available by the European Union.
36. Eighty-one non-governmental organisations represented by 233 individuals have applied to attend the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. The number of applications demonstrates sustained interest from civil society in the activities of the Organisation. Owing to the COVID-19 restrictions, civil society participants will be invited to submit written and video statements to the Conference.

37. In regard to the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), I take this opportunity to welcome the six newly appointed members, whose term will begin in 2022. At the same time, I wish to thank the six departing members of the Board. Among the departing members are the current Chairperson, Dr Christophe Curty, and Dr Zrinka Kovarik, who previously served as Vice-Chairperson. Both Dr Curty and Dr Kovarik have provided outstanding leadership to the Board, especially during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I wish to thank them for their work. The SAB plays an essential role in ensuring that the OPCW keeps pace with advances in science and technology.
38. With regard to the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO), I also wish to welcome 10 new members of the Board and thank the 10 departing members, notably the current Chairperson, Dr Johannes-Georg Weinig from Germany.
39. There were changes in the senior management during the intersessional period. I am pleased to take this opportunity to warmly welcome to the Secretariat the new Director of the External Relations Division, Mr Li Hong. At the same time, we bid farewell to our Legal Adviser, Ms Hafida Lahiouel. I would like to convey to her our best wishes.
40. The construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology—the ChemTech Centre—is progressing well as expected, and the project remains on schedule and on budget. During the intersessional period, ground excavation and foundation piling were completed. The final tender process related to the new Laboratory is now nearing completion. A first pillar ceremony was held on 23 September 2021 to officially mark the start of construction. The ceremony was attended by 97 representatives from 82 States Parties. The Mayor of Pijnacker-Nootdorp, Ms Francisca Ravestein, the Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties, H.E. Mr José Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo, and the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Mr Abdelouahab Bellouki, also attended, along with other important stakeholders. In total, over 180 guests joined together to celebrate this important moment.
41. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 33.65 million have been received from 50 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I sincerely thank all contributors for their generous support. The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions. Such additional donations will provide extra assurances for the successful completion of the project, and for international cooperation and capacity-building activities to be carried out at the Centre as soon as the building is operational. The ChemTech Centre embodies the future of the OPCW.
42. The destruction of the last declared chemical weapons stockpile is drawing to a close. At the same time, the mandates provided by the Convention are enduring and must be fulfilled.
43. The ChemTech Centre will support the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention by States Parties. Areas such as chemical security, assistance and protection, response to new chemical weapons threats, promotion of scientific research, acquisition and sharing of chemical weapons-related knowledge and skills, and training of inspectors and experts from States Parties will take place at the ChemTech Centre. The Centre will be a permanent manifestation of the commitment of States Parties to the missions of the OPCW and an unparalleled knowledge repository for chemical weapons-related expertise.
44. The Organisation works for peace and international security, for the benefit of all mankind.

45. Victims of chemical weapons use should never be forgotten. The International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons was created for that purpose, together with a voluntary trust fund. I wish to thank Andorra for its voluntary contribution today to this important fund.
46. In the implementation of all of the mandates the Secretariat has received from States Parties, you can continue to rely on the Secretariat's dedication and on my personal commitment to the future of the OPCW.

### **Chemical demilitarisation and verification**

#### Status of destruction of declared stockpiles

##### *United States of America*

47. The United States of America has two remaining chemical weapons 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.
48. On 8 July 2021, the BGCAPP main plant started the destruction of VX-filled rockets. In August and September 2021, the United States of America submitted information to the Secretariat on the destruction process, along with declaring the Anniston Static Detonation Chamber (SDC) as a non-contiguous part of the BGCAPP. These details are reflected in the amendments and modifications to the facility agreement and the agreed detailed plan for verification of the BGCAPP Chemical Weapons Destruction Facility (CWDF), which have been submitted to this session of the Council for its consideration (EC-98/DEC/CRP.4 and EC-98/DEC/CRP.5, both dated 24 September 2021).
49. On 4 September 2021, the BGCAPP SDC completed its campaign for the destruction of HD-filled projectiles. On 7 September, the on-site inspection team confirmed that no chemical weapons were remaining at the BGCAPP SDC, which will be closed as a separate CWDF. The SDC will be modified to destroy drained rocket warheads and will be declared as a non-contiguous extension of the BGCAPP, which will be reflected in further amendments and modifications to the facility agreement and the agreed detailed plan for verification of the BGCAPP CWDF. The PCAPP main plant continues its destruction of HD-filled projectiles. Three SDCs are currently undergoing systemisation and will be used to augment the PCAPP's destruction operations.
50. As for the remaining stockpile, as at 30 September 2021 the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,941 MT, or 97.02%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 2.98% of its stockpile by no later than 2023.
51. Following several rounds of consultation and assessments, in September 2021 the United States of America and the Secretariat agreed to lift the temporary COVID-19-related modifications to the verification activities at the BGCAPP and PCAPP facilities. The United States of America and the Secretariat will continue to monitor the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine if modifications again become necessary to protect the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.

### Declarations

52. 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.
53. 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

54. The Secretariat continues to consult National Authorities in order to identify appropriate solutions that would maximise the number of Article VI inspections to be carried out in 2021. However, given the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not be possible to complete all 241 Article VI inspections this year.
55. In 2021, the Secretariat has placed priority on inspections of Schedule 1 facilities and Schedule 2 plant sites. This is in consideration of the Conference decisions adding new chemicals to Schedule 1 (C-24/DEC.4 and C-24/DEC.5, both dated 27 November 2019) and the Convention's requirement that Schedule 2 facilities receive initial inspections within one year of their declaration.

### Enterprise content management

56. Implementation of the enterprise content management (ECM) system continues. The ECM system is designed to replace legacy information systems, to improve the management of information, and to streamline verification business processes, as well as other OPCW activities involving classified information.

### Electronic Declaration Information System

57. In September 2021, a new version of the Electronic Declaration Information System (EDIS) was released to States Parties. The updated version introduced a number of additional features and enhancements, including digitalisation of Article III old chemical weapons declarations and reports, enhanced aggregation of national data, and the resolution of issues with the previous version. I encourage National Authorities to take advantage of this useful tool when preparing their annual declarations.

### Verification Information System

58. The Secretariat continued to prepare for the modernisation of the Verification Information System (VIS) during the intersessional period. This modernisation process will allow for the alignment of the VIS platform with other modern tools developed by the Secretariat and for the incorporation of future user requests.

### Inspector training

59. During the reporting period, the Inspectorate Division remained committed to enhancing its e-learning capabilities, and it continued to develop new courses on various specialised topics.



60. From 18 to 23 July 2021, a group of 15 trainees and three trainers, including inspectors and other Secretariat staff, took part in a Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) course at the United Nations Training Centre in Hammelburg, Germany. A second group of 12 trainees and three trainers undertook the same SSAFE course from 28 August to 3 September. Participation in both courses was sponsored by Germany.
61. From 6 to 29 September 2021, six newly promoted Inspection Team Leaders participated in specialised training aimed at preparing them for their new roles and responsibilities.
62. On 17 and 20 September 2021, two separate refresher sessions of the Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training were held online, with support from the United States of America. As a result, a total of 28 inspectors were recertified and maintained their qualification for deployment on missions to the United States.
63. On 27 September 2021, a new group of 10 inspectors (Group T) joined the OPCW and embarked on the 12-week Initial Inspector Training Programme. The group is expected to graduate on 17 December 2021.
64. I would like to express my gratitude to Germany for its sponsorship and support of the two successful SSAFE courses, and to the United States of America for its support of the online HAZWOPER refresher training courses for our inspectors.

#### OPCW Laboratory

65. The OPCW continues to host two proficiency tests (environmental and biomedical) to validate the capabilities of laboratories receiving authentic samples for analysis. The results of the Forty-Ninth Official OPCW Proficiency Test and the Sixth Official OPCW Biomedical Proficiency Test were finalised in August 2021. The Fiftieth Official OPCW Proficiency Test is scheduled for October 2021.
66. The network of designated laboratories consists of 29 laboratories from 21 States Parties. Twenty-four laboratories from 21 States Parties are designated for environmental sample analysis, and 20 laboratories from 14 States Parties are designated for biomedical sample analysis. Currently, 12 of the 29 laboratories have technical arrangements with the Secretariat in place and are therefore able to receive authentic environmental samples. Similarly, 11 of the 20 laboratories have technical arrangements in place to receive authentic biomedical samples. The OPCW is therefore able to draw on the expertise of roughly half of the designated laboratories for the analysis of environmental and/or biomedical samples. Such technical arrangements are necessary to allow for the conduct of off-site analysis of samples. I therefore encourage States Parties to assist their laboratories in completing such arrangements.
67. Samples for the next exercise on the analysis of biologically derived toxins have been prepared and are undergoing testing. Nominations for the Sixth Official OPCW Exercise on the Analysis of Biologically Derived Toxins are open until 19 November 2021.
68. The Twelfth Chemical Weapons Convention Chemical Analysis Competency Test (CCACT-12) was finalised in September 2021. Nine laboratories from seven States Parties participated in this test. Two of the laboratories achieved a rating of “good”, and one a rating of “very good”. All of the participants are making good progress towards participating in the OPCW Environmental Proficiency Test. CCACT-13 is scheduled to begin in October 2021.

69. On 22 September 2021, the Fifty-Second Validation Group meeting was held virtually to discuss the evaluation of new analytical data for possible inclusion in the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD), and to consider matters related to this database.
70. The OPCW Laboratory's activities related to its Quality Management System (QMS) continue. A reassessment of the OPCW Laboratory's accreditation under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) standards, namely ISO/IEC 17025:2017 and ISO/IEC 17043:2010, was successfully carried out remotely on 3 August 2021 by the Dutch Accreditation Council, the *Raad voor Accreditatie*.

### **International cooperation and assistance**

71. The Secretariat is continuously improving the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of its online learning opportunities, while closely monitoring evolving global conditions, with a view to resuming in-person training events when feasible.
72. 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

73. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat continued to provide support to States Parties with a view to assisting them in the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Convention at the national level.
74. In this context, from 13 to 30 September 2021 a training course on fulfilling declarations and inspections obligations under Article VI of the Convention was delivered online for Arabic-speaking States Parties. The course provided participants with an opportunity to enhance their knowledge of Article VI obligations, to share experiences and best practices, and to discuss Article VI-related issues. Twenty-eight participants from nine Arabic-speaking Asian and African States Parties successfully completed the course.
75. On 21 September, the Secretariat, in cooperation with the World Customs Organization, conducted an online lessons-learned workshop on customs training integration for States Parties in Asia. Thirty representatives from 13 Asian States Parties took part in the event. Discussions focused on challenges and good practices related to the incorporation of Convention-related modules into national customs training curricula. On this occasion, participants reiterated the commitment of their States to ensuring such training was comprehensively integrated into national customs training courses.

### Assistance and protection

76. In the area of assistance and protection, a course on the decontamination of chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals for first responders in African States Parties was organised from 13 to 15 July. This course was jointly conducted by the OPCW and instructors from the Special Risks Brigade of the Argentine Federal Police, as part of the OPCW's Instructor Development and Exchange Programme. This was the first OPCW training on decontamination for African States Parties, with 61 experts from 19 States Parties participating.

77. From 27 to 29 July, a virtual course on conducting sampling and analysis in a highly contaminated environment was held for 17 African States Parties. Forty-seven experts benefitted from this training, jointly organised by the Secretariat and the National Institute of Forensic Science and Criminology (INCC) of the Gendarmerie Nationale of Algeria.
78. From 28 July to 2 August, a specialised training course for Russian-speaking first responders entitled “Chemical Emergency Response: Devices and Equipment” was conducted under the new modular online training programme covering protection against chemical weapons and toxic industrial chemicals. The course, conducted with the International Rescuers Training Centre in Belarus, provided expert knowledge to 56 participants from eight States Parties.
79. From 18 to 20 August, the Secretariat organised, in partnership with the Population Protection Institute of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, an online course on the use of key incident management tools—the Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders (WISER) and the Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG)—for first responders from French-speaking African States Parties. The course was attended by 24 participants from 13 States Parties.
80. On 22 and 23 September, a webinar on chemical security response measures and emergency response arrangements for major public events was attended by 178 experts from 34 African States Parties. Participants exchanged experiences on preparation, planning, training, and inter-agency cooperation for major public events. This webinar was specifically intended to support Cameroon as it prepares to host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2022.
81. On 23 and 24 September, the Secretariat held its first virtual international workshop for women first responders. A total of 134 participants from 34 States Parties attended the workshop, during which they raised awareness regarding gender-based challenges to operational issues and career-building in the fields of response and emergency management.

#### International cooperation

##### *Integrated chemicals management*

82. On 16 July, the Secretariat organised an online training programme on chemical safety and security management for GRULAC Member States. The programme focused on hazard communication and the development of national action plans for the prevention of chemical accidents and incidents. The event was attended by 25 participants representing government agencies, academia, chemical industries, and the defence sector from nine Member States in the GRULAC region.
83. An online course entitled “Wuppertal Online Course – Explosion Protection and Error Management 2021” is being held from 6 September to 8 October for participants from the Africa, Asia, and GRULAC regions. The course includes material newly developed by the University of Wuppertal on explosion basics and incidents, dust and gas explosions, explosion protection, and error management in chemical safety. Twenty-four participants from 21 Member States are taking part in this course, which is funded by a voluntary contribution from Germany.

*Enhancing laboratory capabilities*

84. From 23 to 27 August 2021, the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Finnish Institute for Verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (VERIFIN), organised two parallel online courses on the enhancement of laboratory skills. The first course, focusing on the enhancement of laboratory skills on chemical weapons-related laboratory quality management, was attended by five participants from four Member States. The second course, relating to the enhancement of laboratory skills in liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry, involved four participants from four Member States.
85. The Secretariat is also currently running the following three parallel online analytical chemistry courses: a “Basic Analytical Chemistry Course for Women Chemists” (4 to 13 October); a “Course for Analytical Chemists from Laboratories Supporting Customs Services” (4 to 14 October); and a “Basic Proficiency Testing Course” (4 to 15 October). These training courses are aimed at enhancing participants’ knowledge of the Convention’s scheduled chemicals and their chemistry, sample preparation and analysis, as well as the use of specialised software. Fifty-eight participants from 31 States Parties from all regions have registered to attend these courses.
86. The Secretariat continued to provide assistance to laboratories in Member States through the Laboratory Twinning and Assistance Programme. During the reporting period, the Secretariat evaluated applications for the Programme, conducted discussions with the applicants, and identified potential twinning partners. Progress has been made in relation to the establishment of a twinning partnership between laboratories in Finland and Serbia, with memorandums of understanding between the OPCW and the participating laboratories being concluded in early October.
87. In the same context, a technical evaluation visit regarding the twinning project between laboratories in Germany and Algeria took place from 5 to 6 August 2021. The project plan and necessary agreements are being prepared, with the aim of commencing the project’s activities this year.

Promoting chemical knowledge

88. Under the OPCW Fellowship Programme, two fellowships commenced in September 2021, with the participation of fellows from Cuba (hosted in Italy) and Zimbabwe (hosted in Switzerland). Six more fellowships are scheduled to begin over the next two months.
89. Under the Programme for Support of Research Projects, the Secretariat continued to extend its support to small-scale research projects in Member States in order to promote the development of scientific and technical knowledge in chemistry for industrial, agricultural, research, medical, pharmaceutical, and other peaceful purposes relevant to the Convention. During the reporting period, three new projects (two from Malaysia and one from Argentina) were initiated under the Programme. Presently, there are a total of 23 ongoing research projects that are directly funded by the OPCW.
90. During the reporting period, two scientific events were supported under the Conference Support Programme: the Green Chemistry Postgraduate Summer School 2021 (held from 4 to 10 July 2021 in a hybrid format by the University of Venice with 64 sponsored participants), and the Virtual Conference on Chemistry and its Applications (held online from 9 to 13 August 2021 by the University of Mauritius with 100 sponsored participants).

### Africa Programme

91. The implementation of the OPCW Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention continued to progress quickly, in accordance with the eight objectives of the Programme's fifth phase. During the intersessional period, nine capacity-building activities organised by the Secretariat, including four events exclusively for Africa, accommodated 364 African participants.
92. Training has focused on areas such as enhancing the national implementation of the Convention and the effectiveness of National Authorities, improving control over the cross-border transfer 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.
93. Furthermore, in September, one African scientist began a fellowship under the OPCW Fellowship Programme, while four more are scheduled to begin over the next two months, all with the sponsorship of the OPCW. The Secretariat is also currently sponsoring four ongoing African research projects and co-funding eight others with the International Foundation for Science (IFS). Under the Conference Support Programme, the Secretariat sponsored the participation of 117 African scientists in the aforementioned scientific conferences organised by the University of Venice and the University of Mauritius, in July and August respectively.
94. The Africa Programme continues to be funded essentially through the OPCW's regular budget. To further expand the Programme's depth, reach, and impact, the Secretariat also seeks additional resources through voluntary contributions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank donors and partners for their continued support and contributions to the Africa Programme.
95. In this context, and in reference to the eight special projects proposals for extrabudgetary funding under the Africa Programme, preparations are ongoing for the two projects related to capacity building in the areas of customs laboratories and maintenance of analytical equipment. These two projects have already received full funding from the United States of America and the special fund for capacity-building for laboratories. The Secretariat plans to jointly organise, with the hosting laboratories, two specialised laboratory courses in an in-person format, once the public health situation allows.

### **Scientific Advisory Board**

96. The report of the Thirty-Second Session of the Scientific Advisory Board was published in June (SAB-32/1, dated 17 June 2021). My response to that report has been issued at this session of the Council (EC-98/DG.21, dated 22 September 2021).
97. I am pleased to inform you that I have appointed six new members to the SAB: Professor Elisa Souza Orth of Brazil, Professor Ines Primožič of Croatia, Dr Matteo Guidotti of Italy, Mr Raza Ellahi of Pakistan, Dr Crister Åstot of Sweden, and Dr Robert Kristovich of the United States of America, all of whom will begin their terms on 1 January 2022.

### **Advisory Board on Education and Outreach**

98. I am pleased to report that I have appointed 10 new members to the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO): Dr Graciela Alicia González of Argentina, Dr Jason Openo of Canada, Dr Magda Lidia Bauta Solés of Cuba, Dr Ladislava Navratilova of the Czech Republic, Dr Christopher Daase of Germany, Dr Nezha Barakate of Morocco, Professor Janefrances Ngozi Ihedioha of Nigeria, Professor Ying Zhou of China, Dr Supawan Tantayanon of Thailand, and Professor Vicente Garrido Rebolledo of Spain.
99. The ABEO held its Eleventh Session on 26 and 27 July 2021 and reviewed the final report of the Temporary Working Group (TWG) on e-Learning, which will be included as an annex to the annual report on ABEO activities. The Secretariat is assessing the feasibility of the TWG's recommendations with the aim of adapting the OPCW to new blended methodologies for learning.
100. E-Learning will not only enlarge the skills of the qualified staff within the Secretariat but will also contribute to capacity building of States Parties. It will enable the OPCW to reach wider audiences when raising awareness of its mission. I wish to thank the TWG and the ABEO members for their thorough work in this regard.
101. I wish to thank the European Union for the funding provided in support of the work of the TWG.

### **Administrative and financial matters**

#### Human resources management

102. As part of the OPCW's commitment to enhancing gender and geographic diversity, the Secretariat is currently recruiting a Diversity and Inclusion Officer to coordinate existing initiatives and to develop and implement new activities.
103. The Secretariat recently introduced new learning programmes to support General Service staff members' professional development.
104. As part of the OPCW's managerial excellence programme embedded in the new performance management approach, tailored training courses have been devised, which provide managers with tools to enhance staff performance and engagement, specifically during this period of hybrid working arrangements.

### **Privileges and immunities**

105. Experience has demonstrated the operational value of the OPCW privileges and immunities agreement, including in connection with the independent conduct of the Organisation's activities on the territories of States Parties. Since the last regular session of the Council, the Secretariat has engaged in further discussions with a number of States Parties with a view towards concluding such agreements with them. I also invite States Parties that have not yet concluded or ratified privileges and immunities agreements with the Organisation to do so at the earliest opportunity.

**External relations**

106. Since the Ninety-Seventh Session of the Executive Council, I received at the OPCW Headquarters H.E. Dr Qahtan Al-Janabi, Undersecretary for Legal and Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq (1 September 2021) and H.E. Ms Marta Lucía Ramírez de Rincón, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Colombia (29 September 2021).
107. During the same period, the OPCW welcomed 10 new Permanent Representatives who have presented their credentials, from Burundi, Chile, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, and Sweden.

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