



Ninety-Eighth Session
5 – 7 October 2021

EC-98/DG.30*
5 October 2021
Original: ENGLISH

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

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.

* Reissued in English for technical reasons.



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.

--- 0 ---