



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Sixth Session
29 November – 3 December 2021

C-26/DG.17
29 November 2021
Original: ENGLISH

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
AT ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.
2. I thank the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia of Mexico, for his excellent stewardship of the Conference and the deliberations of the General Committee during this past year. Ambassador Zabalgaitia, the significant time and effort you dedicated for the benefit of States Parties and the Organisation has been especially appreciated. Thanks to your professionalism and personal style, all of the matters related to the Conference were managed in a positive and smooth manner. I also congratulate the Ambassador of Norway, Bård Ivar Svendsen, for his appointment as the Chairperson of the Conference. I look forward to working with you, Mr Chairperson.
3. I also wish to express my profound gratitude to Ambassador Abdelouhab Bellouki of Morocco for his skilled and wise guidance of the Executive Council.
4. Today, we convene at a time when the COVID-19 situation is still of great concern.
5. Throughout this year, the Secretariat has continued to apply the necessary health and safety measures, in line with the Host Country's guidance, to limit the risk of exposure for all delegates and Secretariat staff, while ensuring that the Organisation is able to fulfil its functions. To that effect, concerning Article VI inspections of the chemical industry, the Secretariat has been ramping up inspections as the pandemic evolves. We now expect to accomplish this year more than 80 inspections out of the 241 planned annually. Importantly, the Secretariat was able to accomplish all planned Schedule 1 inspections, as well as inspections at two additional newly declared Schedule 1 facilities.
6. Referring to destruction-related activities, as of 31 October, a total of 71,512 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.90% of all declared chemical weapons, had already been destroyed under verification by the Secretariat.
7. Since we last met in April, the International Cooperation and Assistance Division has delivered 51 online capacity-building events, benefiting over 3,000 participants from all geographical regions. The implementation of the fifth phase of the Africa Programme continued to progress steadily, with 28 training events delivered during the intersessional period, benefiting some 700 participants from 39 African States Parties.



8. Progress on the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) has advanced significantly, within the planned timeline and budget. Construction activities on site began in June. The symbolic placement of the first pillar on 23 September marked an irreversible step in our evolution and adaptation to face future challenges. The foundation and ground floor have been installed, and the concrete and steel structure of the building is now being built. The final construction-related tender was completed in October 2021 with the contract for the specialised laboratory equipment. A detailed update on the project was issued as a Note by the Secretariat (S/2003/2021, dated 9 November 2021).
9. I take this opportunity to point out that the Organisation's work has progressed in 2021, despite the pandemic, thanks to the continued support of all States Parties and the commitment of the Secretariat's staff.
10. A key item before this session is the Organisation's first-ever biennial Programme and Budget for 2022–2023, which was recommended for adoption by the Conference by the Executive Council at its Ninety-Eighth Session. The biennial Programme and Budget will provide the resources necessary to ensure that the OPCW remains fit for the future. It is the only way it can continue to deliver on the mandates assigned to the Organisation by the Convention and the decisions of the Conference and Council. I wish to emphasise that, after a decade of unmitigated loss of purchasing power because of inflation, the OPCW's programmatic activities could not be maintained with a zero nominal growth budgeting approach. This is particularly the case in the absence of any cash surplus for potential supplemental funding. The zero real growth approach applied, to a limited degree, to the 2022–2023 Programme and Budget should bring more sustainability to the implementation of the Organisation's mandates. I acknowledge, with appreciation, the work of the co-facilitators for the budget consultations, Mr Jerzy Gierasimiuk of Poland and Mr Matteo Fachinotti of Switzerland. I thank all delegates who participated in the budget process.
11. Regarding the Secretariat's current financial situation, the External Auditor has confirmed that the OPCW incurred a cash deficit of EUR 1.2 million in 2019. This shortfall was primarily caused by the late or non-payment of assessed contributions. This cash deficit will have to be addressed by the Conference. As at 31 October 2021, the collection level for 2021 assessed contributions was 77.77%, compared to 77.91% on the same date last year. Cash inflows have lagged, once again, considerably more than expected. The Secretariat is closely monitoring the Organisation's cash position, as well as the impact of the pandemic on programme implementation. I must reiterate the importance for all States Parties of paying the assessed contributions, and other reimbursable costs for inspection activities, as early as possible.
12. I have followed the discussions of the States Parties in the context of the facilitation on governance issues. They were related to the possible limited flexibilities that could be introduced to the OPCW's tenure policy. As I have previously emphasised, such limited flexibilities would enable the Organisation to better meet the challenges associated with ensuring continuity of work in a non-career organisational setting. Moreover, these flexibilities would be in line with the policies already in place at our partner organisations, the IAEA and the CTBTO, which have both retained their non-career nature. I have further noted the connections that have been made between the tenure policy and our efforts to achieve greater geographical diversity and gender balance at

the Secretariat. 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.

13. Regarding the latter, I can assure States Parties of my continued and unwavering commitment to attract a more diverse pool of applicants, as demonstrated by the adaptations to our advertising and recruitment policies. At the same time, the mobilisation of States Parties, notably through National Authorities, must accompany the Secretariat's efforts if we are to succeed in meeting our obligation to attract candidates of the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity from all regions.
14. In this respect, the Secretariat has continued in 2021 to announce all fixed-term professional staff vacancies to State Party delegations via notes verbales. Moreover, all regional groups were provided with a provisional list of vacancies in the Secretariat for 2022. This allows all States Parties to fully consider and advertise potential career opportunities for their nationals. I encourage all of you to join us in these necessary outreach efforts.
15. Turning to the Syrian Arab Republic, the Conference at its April session adopted the decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic". It expressed grave concern at the proven cases of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic and decided to suspend the following rights and privileges of this State Party:
 - (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. These rights will be reinstated once I have reported that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed the measures set out in the decision of the Executive Council adopted last July.
17. To date, the Syrian Arab Republic has not completed any of these measures. The Secretariat continues to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the completion of the measures, and reports to the Council as mandated. With the adoption of this decision, States Parties have formally stated that the Syrian Arab Republic is in non-compliance with its obligations under the Convention. Yet, non-compliance should not be seen as a dead end. It is the beginning of a new road, one that shows further commitment from States Parties to ensure that obligations under the Convention are respected by all.
18. For my part, with a view to participating in efforts to restore compliance in the shortest time possible, I have invited Mr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, 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 you informed of further developments on this matter. This engagement takes place in a complex context regarding the current posture of the Syrian Arab Republic at the OPCW.

19. As I reported to the Council at its last session, the Secretariat's activities have been impacted by delays in responses from the Syrian Arab Republic to correspondence regarding planned deployments, and in the issuance of entry visas. As a result, the Secretariat has not been able to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic for eight months this year.
20. In relation to the OPCW Office located at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus—the so-called Command Post—since last April, the Secretariat has been unable to maintain its continuous presence, because of the delays in responses from the Syrian Arab Republic on visa requests for the rotating officers. Consequently, the Office was left without OPCW personnel for a total of more than three months during two separate periods between April and August.
21. The Command Post is central to the OPCW's ability to fulfil its mandates. It liaises with the Syrian authorities and with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in planning and implementing the deployments of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and of mandated inspections to the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), to ensure that they can be conducted in a safe, secure, and efficient manner. Those delays and gaps have negatively affected the Secretariat's planning.
22. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW Mission in Syria, in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement concluded between the OPCW, UNOPS, and the Syrian Arab Republic. The current extension of the Tripartite Agreement is valid through 31 December 2021. On 15 November, the three parties met online and agreed to a six-month extension to the Tripartite Agreement. I wish to underline that this is the very minimum for the Secretariat to allow proper mission planning.
23. As I reported to the Conference at its session last April, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) issued a report on the incident that took place in Saraqib, Syrian Arab Republic, on 4 February 2018. This is the IIT's second report, following the first issued in April last year, and it covers three cases. 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, which released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals. The IIT is continuing its investigations and will issue further reports in due course.
24. The FFM is continuing to prepare further deployments and to analyse information collected from recent deployments. It will issue further reports in due course.
25. In 2021, the DAT persevered with its efforts to clarify the shortcomings found in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme.
26. 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 Syrian side provided its first response to the Secretariat's multiple communications on 16 August 2021, when it confirmed its readiness to hold the consultations in September. At the same time, the Syrian Arab Republic did not issue the visas requested by the Secretariat for the DAT for the upcoming deployment. I wish to recall here that the DAT expert whose visa request was denied has deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic over 20 times in the past seven years.

27. I underline the general obligation of all States Parties, including the Syrian Arab Republic, to cooperate with the Organisation and to provide assistance to the Secretariat, as set out in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. The Syrian Arab Republic is expressly required by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and corresponding Council decisions to accept and provide immediate and unfettered access to the personnel designated by the Secretariat of the OPCW.
28. Owing to the impossibility to deploy the full DAT team to Damascus, the Secretariat tried unsuccessfully to convene a limited meeting in The Hague with Syrian experts. Under these circumstances the Secretariat informed the Syrian National Authority that the DAT will not be deployed until visas have been issued to all members of the team.
29. The Secretariat will continue to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic clarifies the shortcomings identified in its initial declaration, and that it complies with all of its obligations under the Convention, the decisions of the policy-making organs of the Organisation, and the resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations. At this stage, considering all the serious issues that remain unresolved, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete.
30. The use of chemical weapons on the territory of the Russian Federation also poses a serious threat to the Convention. The Conference will recall that on 20 August 2020, Mr Alexei Navalny, a Russian citizen and political activist, was poisoned in the Russian Federation. Two days later, he was transported to Berlin where he was treated.
31. On 5 September 2020, in response to a request from the Federal Republic of Germany, a team of experts from the Secretariat travelled to Berlin and independently collected biomedical samples from Mr Navalny, with his consent, for analysis by OPCW designated laboratories. The analysis found in Mr Navalny's blood traces of a nerve agent with structural characteristics similar to the toxic chemicals that had been added to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention in November 2019. At the request of Germany, the Secretariat shared the summary of its report with all States Parties on 6 October 2020 and made it publicly available.
32. As I reported at the last session of the Conference, the Secretariat received on 6 October 2020 a request from the Russian Federation for a technical assistance visit concerning the incident involving Mr Navalny. Correspondence regarding this request was exchanged between the Secretariat and the Russian Federation to define the legal, technical, operational, and logistical parameters of the visit. This correspondence has been made available on the OPCW public website. As the request did not meet the necessary requirements for the Secretariat to assist the Russian Federation in a way similar to how it has assisted other States Parties, the visit did not take place.
33. On 5 October 2021, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of 45 States Parties, submitted a series of questions to the Russian Federation regarding the poisoning of Mr Navalny on Russian territory. Those questions were put forward pursuant to paragraph 2 of Article IX of the Convention, which allows States Parties to request, from another State Party, clarification of any matter which causes doubt or concern relating to the implementation of the Convention.

34. The Russian Federation responded partially to the request for clarification on 7 October. Together with this response, the Russian Federation further submitted on 7 October its own request under paragraph 2 of Article IX to France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. All four States Parties responded to the Russian Federation's request. Since then, the two sides have exchanged several pieces of correspondence, which the Secretariat has shared with States Parties as requested.
35. At the same time, several questions to the Secretariat were put forward by the Russian Federation in the same submission. I recall that the Secretariat has no role in the procedure under paragraph 2 of Article IX of the Convention.
36. These current developments underscore the importance of strengthening our focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons as we approach the end of the destruction phase.
37. In the United States of America, verification activities at chemical weapons destruction facilities continued, thanks to modifications that ensured the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site. Following a review of the pandemic situation, the Secretariat and the United States resumed normal verification activities at the respective sites from September 2021 onwards, subject to the evolution of the pandemic.
38. Regarding chemical weapons abandoned by Japan in the People's Republic of China, excavation, recovery, and destruction operations resumed in Haerbaling, Jilin Province, in May 2021. At other locations, the destruction operations and related activities, such as excavations and recoveries, remain suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 31 October 2021, a total of 86,158 items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) had been recovered, of which 58,800 were destroyed. A trilateral online meeting between China, Japan, and the Secretariat was held on 18 November 2021. It ensured the continued transparency, addressed technical and practical issues and the implementation of projects in accordance with the appropriate verification measures, and allowed for the planning of future activities. The Secretariat remains in close contact with China and Japan regarding the latest developments on ACW matters. China and Japan continue to maintain their communication regarding the next phase of the programme of work.
39. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, old chemical weapons inspections were conducted at sites in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
40. Concerning Article VI inspections of the chemical industry, notwithstanding the continued COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat will endeavour to accomplish all the Article VI verification work outlined for 2022 in the Programme and Budget. We will accordingly undertake a controlled and phased return to the established processes of the past. The Secretariat intends to communicate details regarding its specific verification plans to individual States Parties in advance of the start of inspections in 2022. I call on all States Parties that are subject to industry verification to make every effort to meet their obligations under the Convention, while taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic.

41. The threat of chemical terrorism cannot be ignored. That is why I urge all States Parties to fully engage in the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism chaired by Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa.
42. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) held three virtual sessions this year, with a focus on its science and technology review process for the Fifth Review Conference. The SAB's Temporary Working Group on the analysis of biotoxins held three meetings in 2021 and is making good progress on its mandate.
43. At its Ninety-Sixth Session, the Executive Council adopted a decision entitled "Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes". This decision will be considered by the Conference at this session.
44. As I have mentioned, we are close to achieving the goal of eliminating all of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles. I would like to recall again that, despite the end of the destruction, the OPCW's mission will be far from finished. Over the past years, the Secretariat has been adapting to face the traditional and the new threats posed by the evolving security landscape.
45. The ChemTech Centre will be an essential tool in the efforts to face the new and challenging situation. I wish to thank you for your support and contributions to initiate and proceed with the construction, on time and on budget. We have carried out informal consultations with States Parties and regional groups to listen to and incorporate your priorities into the activities to be offered at the Centre. We are working to ensure that the activities at the Centre to be covered by the general budget, as well as voluntary contributions, expand on all aspects of the Convention, including:
 - (a) research to support and strengthen the verification regime, as well as non-routine missions;
 - (b) training and equipping Technical Secretariat staff for different types of routine and non-routine missions;
 - (c) assisting States Parties through capacity-building activities to fulfil their obligations, and to prevent and respond to chemical weapons use;
 - (d) supporting international cooperation in different areas;
 - (e) acting as a knowledge repository for chemical weapons-related expertise; and
 - (f) enhancing the Organisation's capability to lead the network of partner laboratories in research and analytical activities.
46. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 33,839,795 have been received from 52 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I sincerely thank all contributors for your very valuable 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 programmes to be carried out at the Centre as soon as the building is operational. As has been the case with the construction project, the Secretariat will keep States Parties informed about progress in the identification of activities for the ChemTech Centre.

47. The next few years will offer us significant opportunities to highlight important moments. In 2022, we will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention. I encourage all States Parties to mark this occasion in your countries as you deem fit. The ChemTech Centre is due to be completed by the end of 2022 and the facility will become operational in 2023. The inauguration ceremony could take place in the spring of 2023.
48. In April 2023, the Fifth Review Conference will be convened. That same year, we will commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Convention for signature. As we enter this historic period, the ongoing support and commitment of all States Parties will be vital to upholding the global norm against the use of chemical weapons. Once again, I assure you of the dedication of the Secretariat to support you in this shared endeavour.
49. 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.
50. Tomorrow in this room, the Conference will mark the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare with a minute's silence. On this solemn occasion we will reaffirm our solidarity with the victims and our commitment to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.
51. Thank you for your attention.

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