



Thirty-Fourth Session of the Scientific Advisory Board

Remarks by the Deputy Director-General of the OPCW, Ms Odette Melono

15 March 2022

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Scientific Advisory Board,
Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, I am honoured to welcome you to the Thirty-Fourth Session of the Scientific Advisory Board.

First, let me communicate the well-wishes of the Director General who was unable to join us today.

He looks forward to meeting everyone again in person as soon as the situation permits.

The last two years have been challenging for everyone.

Yet, people have shown their resilience. And the OPCW, and the SAB, have continued their work.

This will be the sixth SAB Session that has been held since the pandemic began – a testament to the dedication and professionalism of the Board.

Mr Chairperson,

Science and technology are ingrained in the Chemical Weapons Convention. Developments in science and technology need to be closely followed in order to ensure the continued relevance and success of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is especially important now that the OPCW is in the process of adapting to changing security circumstances amid rapid advances in science and technology.

Today, we welcome six new Board members:

Professor Elisa Souza Orth of Brazil,
Professor Ines Primožic of Croatia,
Dr Matteo Guidotti of Italy,
Mr Raza Ellahi of Pakistan,
Dr Crister Astot of Sweden, and
Dr Robert Kristovich of the United States of America.

Congratulations on your appointments to the SAB. I wish you every success in serving the SAB and the OPCW.

Distinguished Board members,

I am pleased to inform you that the OPCW is continuing to make significant progress in upgrading the OPCW Laboratory into a “Centre for Chemistry and Technology” or “ChemTech Centre”.

The ChemTech Centre will be an important tool to support the mission and work of the Organisation.

It will embody the OPCW’s commitment to science and technology and its role as the world’s pre-eminent repository of chemical weapons expertise and knowledge.

The construction of the ChemTech Centre is on track to be completed by the end of this year. In early 2023, the OPCW laboratory and equipment store will start to transition their operations to the new premises.

Now that the construction phase is well underway, the Secretariat has turned its attention to the activities that will take place within the Centre.

I recall that the SAB spent some time during its last Session deliberating on possible scientific activities that could be considered.

The Secretariat looks forward to the SAB’s recommendations upon the completion of its discussions.

The Secretariat recently released a Note entitled ‘Anticipated Programmes and Activities at the Centre for Chemistry and Technology.’

The Note outlines the Secretariat’s initial plans for future activities in the Centre that span the entire user-base of the facility – from research to strengthen the verification regime, to training Secretariat staff for all types of mandated missions, to international cooperation and assistance programmes designed to enhance the capacities of States Parties. All these activities will help the OPCW to more effectively prevent and respond to chemical weapons use, as well as support the peaceful use of chemistry.

I hope you have had a chance to consider the anticipated programmes set out in this Note, which may help to guide your deliberations on the matter.

Distinguished members,

The Board continues to move ahead with its important work.

The Temporary Working Group on the analysis of biotoxins is well underway.

The recommendations from this Working Group will be very helpful in defining some of the forward-looking scientific activities that could take place in the ChemTech Centre.

Since the last meeting of the SAB, the Conference of the States Parties adopted at its Twenty-Sixth Session the decision entitled “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central

Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes”. By this decision, the Conference understands that the aerosolised use of CNS-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a ‘purpose not prohibited’ under the Convention.

The SAB’s extensive work in this area is explicitly recognised in the decision.

Furthermore, in this decision, the SAB’s asked to continue to review relevant developments in science and technology related to CNS-acting chemicals and provide updates to the Conference as appropriate. In particular, this should be part of its report on developments in science and technology for future Review Conferences. During this meeting, you will be provided with a presentation from the Secretary of the SAB on how this process may go forward.

As you know, the Fifth Review Conference will take place in the Hague, in May 2023.

I acknowledge with appreciation that the Board is busy with preparing its Scientific Report in support of this Review Conference and look forward to reading the Report.

It will be important to issue it well ahead of the Review Conference, so that States Parties can fully profit from having an independent analysis of science and technology trends of relevance to the Convention.

Distinguished members of the SAB,

The Scientific Advisory Board represents a wealth of experience and scientific expertise, and the OPCW can only benefit from your contributions. Your continued expert advice to the OPCW in the post destruction phase and for heightened non-proliferation efforts in the future will be more vital than ever before.

We greatly appreciate the dedication that you bring to your mission and to your work in this important body. The expertise each one of you offers is crucial for ensuring the continued success and relevance of the Chemical Weapons Convention and its verification regime.

I wish you a productive Session and look forward to inviting you all back to the Hague soon to continue your work in person.

Thank you for your attention.
