



NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

**UPDATE ON THE IMPACT OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE
NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON THE ORGANISATION
FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS PROGRAMME IN 2020**

1. On 20 March 2020, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) issued a Note on the impact of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on the Organisation for the Prohibition on Chemical Weapons (OPCW) work programme in 2020 (S/1863/2020, dated 20 March 2020). The present Note updates States Parties on the measures that have been taken by the Secretariat in response to the pandemic.
2. The Secretariat is making every effort to minimise to the extent possible the impact of this situation on the implementation of the OPCW’s activities and programme in 2020. To this end, the internal Task Force established by the Director-General continues to monitor and assess the situation, in particular the measures put in place by the Dutch authorities, and to make recommendations to the Director-General on appropriate measures for the OPCW.

CONTINGENCY STAFFING

3. On 26 March 2020, the Director-General decided, based on the recommendations of the Task Force and in light of the measures announced by the Dutch Government on 23 March 2020, to authorise Secretariat personnel as a temporary measure to work remotely, insofar as is feasible, and to rescind the previous categories of “critical” and “non-critical” staff as outlined in Note S/1863/2020. This means that all personnel are now considered to be in full-time work status. The move to remote working for most staff will have an impact upon a number of Secretariat work processes, and therefore some additional time required for the completion of certain activities should be anticipated.
4. Group visits and private visitors to OPCW facilities remain suspended until further notice.
5. The period of postponement of non-essential travel worldwide, including for training, has been extended to 1 June 2020. Such travel will be rescheduled to take place later in the year, as necessary, when circumstances allow.



VERIFICATION

6. With respect to Article IV inspections, the Secretariat will continue its verification activities at the chemical weapons destruction facilities, under temporary modifications in accordance with Secretariat Notes EC-94/S/1, EC-94/S/2, EC-94/S/3, and EC-94/S/4 (all dated 6 April 2020), in light of the need to take all reasonable measures to ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel at the sites, and taking into account the applicable health and safety regulations of the concerned State Party. The Secretariat continues to closely consult with the National Authority of the concerned State Party in this regard.
7. Inspections related to abandoned chemical weapons continue to be postponed, and will be rescheduled in consultation with the concerned States Parties. The Secretariat continues to consult with both concerned States Parties in this regard.
8. Inspections related to old chemical weapons continue to be postponed and will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
9. Inspections related to Article V and Executive Council decision EC-67/DEC.7 (dated 16 February 2012) in respect of former chemical weapons production facilities will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
10. The Secretariat has extended the period of postponement of all Article VI inspections in all States Parties to 1 June 2020. Those Article VI inspections that are affected will be rescheduled, if possible, to take place later this year when the circumstances allow, taking into account any national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 as well as the health and safety of inspectors. As a result of the measures taken in response to the pandemic situation, it will not be possible to complete all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020. When it is feasible for Article VI inspections to recommence, taking into account the public health situation in States Parties, any travel restrictions in States Parties, and the availability of flights, the Secretariat will make every effort to maximise the number of Article VI inspections conducted.
11. All missions of the Secretariat in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to be postponed until further notice. The Secretariat will monitor the situation closely and will keep the Syrian Arab Republic and States Parties duly informed.
12. The Secretariat continues to receive and evaluate States Parties' declarations and amendments under Articles III, IV, V, and VI, with its current focus being annual declarations of past activities for 2019 (in accordance with paragraph 8 of Article VI of the Chemical Weapons Convention).

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

13. The period of postponement of all capacity-building events with States Parties has been extended until at least 1 June 2020. The International Cooperation and Assistance Division will continue to engage with hosting States Parties to explore the options for rescheduling such events, if possible. As the evolution of the pandemic remains unclear, however, it may be challenging to reschedule all planned activities.

It is therefore anticipated that further adjustments to the annual working plan will need to be made. These adjustments will be communicated by the Secretariat to States Parties and to all stakeholders in a timely manner.

MEETINGS AT OPCW HEADQUARTERS

14. In light of the measures restricting in-person gatherings, as well as travel restrictions currently in place, a number of meetings that usually take place at the OPCW Headquarters during this period have either been cancelled or postponed to take place later in the year. Where possible, the Secretariat may be able to facilitate meetings through the use of remote communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams. The Secretariat continues to consult with the Chairs, Facilitators, and Coordinators of such groups to identify the best means to proceed and will inform all stakeholders in due course.

NEXT STEPS

15. The Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and to adopt appropriate mitigating measures, and will keep States Parties apprised of any relevant developments.

--- 0 ---