



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Thirty-Ninth Session
25 – 29 November 2024

C-29/DG.17
25 November 2024
Original: ENGLISH

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TO THE TWENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE
OF THE STATES PARTIES**

1. I welcome all delegations to the Twenty-Ninth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I also welcome all our distinguished guests.
2. I thank you, Ambassador Suljuk Mustansar Tarar of Pakistan, as outgoing Chairperson, for your interest, demonstrated through your active engagement and commitment, as well as your efficient and skilful steering of the Conference and the General Committee throughout the past year.
3. I also wish to congratulate you, Ambassador Almir Šahović of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on your appointment as the new Chairperson of the Conference. The time and effort you have already devoted in your preparations to occupy this high function, as you did before that as regional coordinator, give us full confidence that you will make an excellent Chairperson of this Conference. Ambassador Šahović, I assure you of the Secretariat's full support in your new role.
4. Since last year's session of the Conference, the international security environment has continued to deteriorate. Last week, the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation reached its one-thousandth day. For the first time in the history of the Organisation, two States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention are at war, each alleging that the other has used chemical weapons. The war in Gaza began over a year ago. Today's international environment is especially challenging, and is characterised by escalating tensions and constant pressure on the global security architecture. Under these circumstances, the OPCW remains on alert and ready to act, upon request.
5. Notwithstanding this situation, the Secretariat has successfully delivered on a full agenda in the course of the year, with the support of States Parties. The progress we have made across all our mandates contributes to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.
6. The verification regime remains central to these efforts, through the inspections of the chemical industry. As at 31 October 2024, the Secretariat had completed 175 industry inspections this year. We are expecting to complete the remaining 25 inspections by the end of the year, reaching the 200 inspections planned in the Budget for 2024.
7. Earlier this month, we reached the 500th chemical industry inspection in China. Since the establishment of the OPCW in 1997, more than 10 percent of all industry inspections worldwide have taken place in China, the country with the biggest chemical industry.



8. In addition to the Secretariat's inspections, we have maintained our focus on building and enhancing the skills of the Organisation's inspectors. This ensures our readiness for all types of missions. This bears particular importance in the current international security environment. Throughout the year, the Inspectorate Division provided, coordinated, or took part in 52 training courses, with 533 participants (for a combined 2,341 training days). These trainings took place at the OPCW Main Building, the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre), and external facilities.
9. At the same time, the completion of the Inspectorate Division's restructuring has reinforced our readiness to respond according to the new needs. The cost efficiencies generated have been redirected to supporting capacity-building activities, evaluating the potential impact of new and emerging technologies on the work of the Inspectorate, and modernising Inspectorate processes.
10. Although the task of verifying the destruction of all declared stockpiled chemical weapons was achieved in 2023, the verification of destruction of non-stockpiled weapons continues.
11. This year, the Secretariat conducted four review visits to the Blue Grass chemical weapons destruction facility and its non-contiguous facilities in the United States of America, to verify the disposal of chemical weapons component wastes. In addition, the Secretariat verified the closure of three chemical weapons destruction facilities for recovered chemical weapons in the United States.
12. China and Japan have maintained bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China. As at 31 October 2024, a total of 142,285 items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) had been recovered, of which 112,458 items had been verified by the Secretariat as destroyed. From 18 to 22 September, upon the joint invitation of China and Japan, I visited China together with the Chairperson of the Executive Council and a delegation of members and observers from the Council. We visited the Haerbaling ACW destruction site in Jilin Province and the Mudanjiang excavation and recovery site in Heilongjiang Province. In Beijing, Mudanjiang, and Haerbaling, we were given extensive briefings about the progress of the tasks. I wish to thank both China and Japan for the hospitality and information we received. I commend the continued commitment demonstrated by China and Japan in fulfilling their ongoing obligations under the Convention.
13. Following Germany's declaration of ACW, in October 2024 the Executive Council adopted an agreed detailed plan and facility arrangement between the OPCW and Germany for the destruction of these items. Germany is preparing to destroy these items at the GEKA facility in Munster.
14. Since the last session of the Conference, inspections of old chemical weapons have been conducted at sites in Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
15. Of the three planned inspections of former chemical weapons production facilities this year, the Secretariat conducted two at converted facilities in Libya. The third planned inspection, to take place in Iraq, was not conducted due to security restrictions.

16. The Secretariat's ability to respond effectively to contingency situations and requests for assistance from States Parties is supported by the network of designated laboratories. During the intersessional period, the number of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic environmental samples increased from 29 to 33. The four newly designated laboratories are in Algeria, Japan, Poland, and Türkiye. This means that there is now at least one designated laboratory in every region. This provides additional guarantees for the independence of this highly professional network.
17. This year, the Secretariat delivered a total of 100 capacity-building activities for States Parties on national implementation and assistance and protection measures. Twenty-six of these activities were carried out using the ChemTech Centre, benefiting over 2,400 participants from all geographical regions. Key initiatives included a new assistance and protection training cycle, for women first responders, a course on investigations on chemical incidents for law enforcement agencies, a laboratory equipment maintenance course, and a workshop on the illicit transfer of scheduled chemicals.
18. I wish to highlight the Secretariat's deployment to Seychelles, at its Government's request, last May, to carry out an assistance and protection mission. We provided technical advice and support to the Seychelles authorities. Our advice focused on comprehensive Convention implementing legislation, coordination among relevant national stakeholders, and the establishment of effective command channels for chemical incident response.
19. The ability of States Parties to detect, pursue, and prosecute at the national level any breach of the Convention is the most effective shield against activities by non-State actors. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism continues to play a central role as the primary forum for all States Parties to tackle issues related to chemical terrorism. In 2024, the Working Group developed an action plan to guide its future activities, with a focus on capacity building, policy exercises, technological advancements, and strengthened partnerships.
20. A major priority for the Secretariat is keeping abreast of scientific and technological developments, particularly emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). Last April, we convened a two-day meeting with external experts on AI to explore its potential implications for the Convention and the work of the OPCW. It took place in the building of the Organisation, as well as at the premises of the ChemTech Centre. This meeting deepened our understanding of AI, the opportunities it offers, and the potential risks it entails. The outcome of this meeting was shared in a Note by the Secretariat that was circulated to all States Parties. Last June, I delivered the keynote address at the "Artificial Intelligence and Weapons of Mass Destruction" conference in Berlin, Germany, organised by the German Federal Foreign Office. Also in June, the Secretariat launched the "AI Research Challenge", inviting States Parties to propose innovative ways in which AI could be used at the OPCW. The Organisation received 22 submissions, of which four proof-of-concept ideas have been selected for funding. I wish to thank the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for their financial contributions to this initiative.
21. Building on this, last October, the Kingdom of Morocco and the OPCW co-hosted the first "Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Advancing the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention" in Rabat, Morocco. I seize this

opportunity to thank the Kingdom of Morocco for meticulously co-organising and generously hosting this important event of a world-class standard. I also express my appreciation to all the States Parties that made financial contributions to this event. I have no doubt in stating that the conference was a great success. It helped to facilitate a better understanding of the role of AI in the implementation of the Convention, contextualise the developments within the broader international landscape and the United Nations framework, identify fields of activities of the Secretariat that could benefit from the use of AI in a responsible manner, and inform policy discussions and initiatives to address the evolving risks and threats posed by AI-enabled technologies in the fields of chemical security and disarmament. The Secretariat is preparing a comprehensive note that will be circulated among all States Parties with substantive details about the work and outcome of the conference.

22. Complementing these initiatives, the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) provides a technical foundation for our discussions on how AI developments can be used in our common work. Further to the SAB's recommendation, I have established a new temporary working group (TWG) specifically dedicated to AI, which will begin its mandate on 1 January 2025.
23. I recall that the Secretariat has been called upon by the Convention itself, as well as repeatedly by States Parties, to make use of advances in science and technology. Already in 2013, the Third Review Conference noted that "the verification system should continue to be improved in a manner consistent with the Convention in response to advances in science and technology, taking into consideration, as appropriate, the SAB's advice to the Director-General". The Council's decision to introduce on its agenda a dedicated item on "Emerging technologies", including AI, is both appropriate and timely. This agenda item will provide a useful channel for States Parties to exchange on this topic and, when ripe, to adopt the necessary decisions at the appropriate time.
24. Regarding the persistent challenge of chemical weapons use, and allegations of use, I would like to emphasise that addressing any alleged or proven violations of the norm remains the responsibility of the policy-making organs and of each State Party to the Convention. At the same time, the Secretariat continues to maintain and strengthen its expertise and capacity to respond to requests from States Parties.
25. A significant number of allegations of use are contained in the compendium of correspondence received from the Permanent Representations of the Russian Federation and Ukraine. All this information has been shared by the Secretariat with all States Parties, and it illustrates the magnitude of the endeavour we face. Since the beginning of the year, the Secretariat has continued to deliver support to Ukraine, upon its request, in the field of assistance and protection. Contributions from States Parties to the Trust Fund on Assistance and Protection for Ukraine, created under Article X, have enabled the Secretariat to assist Ukrainian experts by launching three specialised courses on emergency response, helping Ukraine to acquire protection and detection equipment and providing training on its use, and conducting three technical assistance visits this year, in July, September, and October. As of 11 November, contributions to the trust fund for Ukraine assistance had reached over EUR 4.5 million, with more than EUR 2.5 million already spent.

26. In addition to the assistance to Ukraine, the Secretariat was seized, under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention, to deploy an OPCW technical assistance visit (TAV) team to Ukraine. This request was made in relation to an incident that reportedly took place on 20 September 2024, along the confrontation lines, between opposing forces, near the village of Illinka in the Dnipropetrovsk region. The TAV team collected evidence from Ukraine, including samples, documentation, first-hand witness testimonies, videos, and photographs. The TAV team analysed the metadata of the videos and photographs received, and confirmed that they had not been tampered with. The Secretariat confirms that the chain of custody of the samples, and the supporting evidence I just mentioned, was maintained until we received them in Ukraine. In addition to the witness testimonies received, the OPCW TAV team directly conducted five interviews with first-hand witnesses. The aforementioned samples related to the incident consisted of a grenade and two soil samples from the scene. I requested two OPCW designated laboratories to analyse those samples, separately and independently from one another. Both laboratories confirmed that the grenade and a soil sample collected from the trench where it fell contained the riot control agent 2-Chlorobenzylidenemalononitrile, known as CS.
27. Under the Convention, the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare is prohibited. As you well know, the use of any toxic chemical as weapons is prohibited under the Convention, and consequently is contrary to the obligations to which the States Parties have committed themselves. Such actions undermine the global norm against chemical weapons use. It is your responsibility, States Parties, to defend the Convention, and to do so in the way you deem fit. For its part, the Secretariat stands ready to support the States Parties in this important task.
28. Beyond Ukraine, chemical weapons, along with their use and threat of use, remain a major international concern. Over the past decade, chemical weapons use has been documented in Iraq, Malaysia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
29. Despite more than a decade of intensive work, the Syrian Arab Republic chemical weapons dossier still cannot be closed.
30. Through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), which has deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic already 28 times, the Secretariat has continued its efforts to clarify the shortcomings in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration. Since the last session of the Conference, the DAT has held three rounds of consultations in the Syrian Arab Republic, in January, May, and September 2024. During these rounds of consultations, the DAT conducted technical meetings with experts from the Syrian National Authority; discussed the status of outstanding issues and the ways towards resolving them; interviewed several persons who were involved in the Syrian chemical weapons programme; discussed the results of the analysis of samples collected by the DAT between 2020 and 2023; collected samples at two declared former chemical weapons production sites in May 2024; and shared the results of the analysis of these samples in September 2024.
31. As a result of the work of the DAT, the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted 20 amendments to its initial declaration, informing the Secretariat about additional, previously undeclared elements of its chemical weapons programme. Since 2014, the

Secretariat has reported a total of 26 outstanding issues, of which seven have been resolved. The substance of the remaining 19 outstanding issues is of serious concern, as it involves large quantities of potentially undeclared or unverified chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions. Two of these issues relate to the possible full-scale development and production of chemical weapons. This may have occurred at two declared chemical weapons-related sites where no activity was supposed to have taken place, according to the Syrian National Authority. The inspectors of the Organisation detected relevant elements at those sites and put questions to the Syrian Arab Republic which, so far, have not been answered appropriately. Under the Convention, the Syrian Arab Republic is obligated to submit accurate and complete declarations of its chemical weapons programme. The Secretariat's mandate is to verify that this has indeed happened, and so far, we have not been able to do so.

32. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Council decision adopted on 11 November 2016, the Secretariat has conducted a total of 11 rounds of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). The last round of inspections took place from 13 to 19 November 2024, and the outcome will be reported in due course. We are in the process of planning the second round of these inspections before the end of the year, in line with the mandate received, if security conditions allow. The Secretariat is also following up on two issues arising from these inspections: the presence of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical in the sample collected during the third round of inspections in November 2018; and the presence of a large quantity of a dual-use chemical at the SSRC Barzah facility observed during the ninth inspection of the SSRC.
33. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) has issued two reports since the Conference last met. The first report was issued in February 2024 (S/2254/2024, dated 22 February 2024). It concluded that the information obtained and analysed as a whole was not sufficient to provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as weapons in the reported incident in al-Yarmouk, in the Syrian Arab Republic, on 22 October 2017. The second FFM report was issued in June 2024 (S/2295/2024, dated 11 June 2024). It concluded that the information obtained and analysed as a whole was not sufficient to provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as weapons in the reported incidents that occurred on 9 August 2017 in Qalib al-Thawr, and on 8 November 2017 in al-Balil, Hama Governorate, the Syrian Arab Republic. I recall that the Secretariat conducts its own independent investigations, for which the FFM relies, among other sources, on information shared by States Parties, as mandated by the Executive Council. Since the last Conference, the FFM has carried out seven deployments to collect further information regarding allegations under review. In this regard, the Secretariat provided extensive briefings to States Parties on 29 February, 2 July, and 1 October 2024, ahead of each regular session of the Executive Council.
34. In parallel, the FFM is participating in the Secretariat's knowledge transfer activities. The FFM continues to work on allegations that have been assessed as credible and analysing information collected from deployments conducted by its team. The FFM is also preparing for upcoming deployments. The Secretariat will report on the allegations under investigation in due course.

35. On 22 February 2024, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) issued a report on the incident that occurred in Marea, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 1 September 2015. This was the IIT's fourth report on the sixth incident it investigated, delivering on the mandate that the IIT received from the Conference to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in Syria. The report concluded that during sustained attacks aimed at capturing the town of Marea in the Syrian Arab Republic, units of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) used sulfur mustard, delivered using one or more artillery guns. The fourth IIT report is a stark reminder to the international community that non-State actors like ISIL have developed the capacity and willingness to use chemical weapons. It further emphasises the OPCW's pivotal role and expertise in addressing such threats. The IIT also continues to preserve and review information and evidence collected for the purposes of transferring them to the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), as mandated by the Conference of the States Parties. In addition, the IIT has been transferring knowledge and skills to relevant units of the Secretariat.
36. I wish to emphasise that all mandates related to the Syrian chemical dossier, conferred by the Convention and decisions of the policy-making organs, remain binding on all States Parties and the Secretariat. It is up to you, the States Parties, to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic fulfils all its obligations. The Secretariat, for its part, remains committed to its mandate of verifying the full implementation by the Syrian Arab Republic of all its obligations under the Convention, as well as decisions of the OPCW policy-making organs and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.
37. In closing on the Syrian file, I would like to further recall the decision on "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use and the Threat of Future Use" adopted by the Conference at its last session (C-28/DEC.12, dated 30 November 2023). This decision introduces new requests for all States Parties and gives the Secretariat additional mandates, including on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. The Secretariat is meeting its reporting requirements arising from this decision by making the necessary adjustments to its existing reporting obligations.
38. The risks that armed conflicts pose in terms of use or threat of use of chemical weapons, remind us of the unfinished task of universality. I urge all States Parties to renew your own bilateral efforts, with the four States not Party, to encourage them to accede to or ratify the Convention as soon as possible.
39. The activities I have outlined illustrate that after the end of the destruction of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles, the Secretariat's work has not diminished, neither in complexity nor in magnitude. A Secretariat that has the best equipment and staff with the greatest possible expertise is more important than ever.
40. The Draft Revised Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2025, recommended by the Council by consensus, is submitted for adoption by the Conference. We have proposed a minor adjustment to the 2025 Programme and Budget to accommodate the transfer of the Organisation's Provident Fund to in-house management. These changes are necessary considering that the Secretariat will assume the functions associated with the management of the OPCW Provident Fund following a decision by ABN AMRO Bank, which until recently was the pension management provider, to unilaterally terminate its services. The increase will be offset against savings in other programme lines and will therefore be budget neutral.

41. The most pressing priority is to upgrade the physical security measures at the Headquarters Main Building to meet the minimum levels defined by the United Nations. Since the forceful incursion by a mob of violent intruders into the Headquarters Main Building on 3 December 2021, the Secretariat has worked to reinforce its security. Many of you will have noticed the work to fortify the entrance lobby of the Headquarters Main Building, which commenced this autumn and is to be completed soon. The next and final critical step related to the security upgrade is the strengthening of the fence that protects the perimeter of the Headquarters Main Building. This will include a new fence and front guard house. The total estimated cost of this upgrade is EUR 6 million. For this security upgrade, the Secretariat has included EUR 3 million in its revised 2025 Budget proposal, with the recommendation that it be funded from a portion of the 2022 cash surplus. Given the responsibility of the Host Government for ensuring the security of the OPCW, the Dutch Government has committed EUR 1 million for this purpose. As work proceeds, the Secretariat will revert to the Host Government and all States Parties, as appropriate, regarding financing for the remaining requirements. For now, we have generated enough savings and collected contributions to initiate the works in an orderly manner.
42. As mandated by the Conference at its last session, the Secretariat has continued its preparatory work for its membership in the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF), effective 1 January 2025. The necessary policy and procedural arrangements, which have been endorsed by the Council and the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters, will be presented to this session of the Conference in the form of proposed amendments to the Staff Regulations and a draft membership agreement. The OPCW's membership of the UNJSPF remains contingent on approval by the United Nations General Assembly next month. This improvement will help the Secretariat to broaden its capacity to recruit and attract high-level professionals from other international organisations that are already part of this system.
43. Another matter that is high on our agenda includes the initiatives that we are pursuing regarding the "Implementation of the Action Plan on Geographical Representation", adopted by the Executive Council in March 2024. The measures that we have implemented include tailoring outreach activities to target professionals and young talent in specific regions, increasing the internship stipend, and extending the duration of vacancy announcements when fewer than 15% of applicants come from any one region. As a result, we have seen progress in this area, including a doubling of applications for professional level posts this year, compared to the previous calendar year. Additionally, Secretariat staff members from the Africa and the Latin American and Caribbean regions now occupy the highest number of professional posts ever recorded for these regions in the Organisation's nearly 30-year history.
44. As the OPCW adapts to a dynamic global security and technological landscape, we must make the best use of available talent and expertise, while preserving the non-career nature of the Organisation.
45. In 2015, the Conference granted the Director-General the authority to rehire former inspectors in a limited manner, in view of the need to support institutional memory, existing capacities, and knowledge transfer. Given the continuing requirements in this area, a draft decision to extend this specific rehiring authority has been recommended by the Executive Council for consideration by the Conference at this session.

46. In reference to the decision adopted by the Conference at its last session on limited exceptions to the OPCW tenure policy, I must highlight a final remaining gap: the Director-General's inability to rehire some former staff, aside from the narrowly defined authority to rehire inspectors. Such flexibility, limited to only six positions out of the 470 authorised fixed term positions, would align the OPCW with its sister organisations, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. Both have enjoyed this possibility in a much larger amount, and for a very long time. I thank Mexico and New Zealand for their efforts to explain to the States Parties the benefits and need for this possible limited improvement in the governance of the Secretariat. This would be the last in a series of steps taken since 2018 to ensure the modernisation of the Secretariat and its capacity to attract, train, and retain the best experts.
47. The measures already adopted include: the construction of the ChemTech Centre and the development of programmes to support States Parties; the extensions since 2019 to continue the rehiring of inspectors; the complete reform, this year, of the Inspectorate—the Secretariat's largest division, which is already bringing efficiencies to redeploy funds to mandated activities; biannual budgeting, which allows for better flexibility and predictability; improvements in the broad geographical distribution of staff members, with roughly 80 nationalities present at the Secretariat and with under-represented geographical groups being at their highest levels since the establishment of the Organisation in 1997; the work to improve gender balance in the Secretariat; improvements in physical security, cybersecurity, and business continuity at the Secretariat; and the prospective membership in the UNJSPF.
48. The OPCW is a Nobel Peace Prize-winning Organisation. The Nobel Peace Prize resulted in an important fund that is used every year for the winners of the OPCW-The Hague Award, presented by the Municipality of The Hague and the OPCW. The ceremony will take place here in this hall, the King Willem-Alexander Theater, in a few minutes, and we will have the privilege of being accompanied by Mr Jan van Zanen, Mayor of the City of The Hague.
49. States Parties will also be aware that each year, the Conference honours the memory of the victims of chemical weapons. The International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons was created for that purpose, together with a voluntary trust fund. I thank Andorra and Austria for their recent financial contributions. At 9:45 on the morning of Wednesday, 27 November, prior to the start of our proceedings, we will observe a moment of silence for the victims.
50. More than ever, the responsibility of the Conference of the States Parties to promote and defend the Chemical Weapons Convention, is brought to the fore. The Secretariat has been doing its utmost in the preparations for this important meeting to contribute to its success. I thank you for your attention.