NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

STATUS REPORT ON THE VERIFICATION INFORMATION SYSTEM

Introduction

1. The Verification Information System (VIS) is the information system that has been developed by the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") to manage all verification-related information and to support verification activities.

2. The concept for the development of the VIS was presented by the Director-General in a Note to the Executive Council (hereinafter "the Council") at its Fortieth Session (EC-40/S/2, dated 27 January 2005). The Secretariat provides regular updates to the Council on the status of the development of the VIS.[1] Following the most recent Note in this series (EC-96/S/5, dated 18 February 2021), this Note summarises activity from the first quarter of 2021 to date.

Overview of the Verification Information System

3. The VIS is the key technology platform that supports the Secretariat's verification-related activities, including the conduct of various business processes, the collection, management, and analysis of data, and secure communication with States Parties. The VIS consists of a number of software applications, some of which are used only by the Secretariat (to manage and analyse data), some only by States Parties (to prepare and submit annual declarations), and some by both the Secretariat and States Parties (to communicate securely). The VIS and its constituent elements are continually reviewed and updated or replaced as necessary.

The Verification Information System industry modernisation project

4. In 2020, the Secretariat launched a project to review and upgrade an existing software application ("VIS-Industry"), which collects and stores Article VI declaration data and which will, with time, become increasingly unstable. In 2021 and 2022, the Secretariat continued the execution of that VIS-Industry modernisation project. The activities carried out in 2021 focused on the identification and design of new architecture, the creation of a comprehensive list of tasks to be carried out as part of the modernisation process (such as the "backlog of work items"), and the finalisation of the project plan for related

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[1] The five most recent updates are contained in the following Notes issued by the Secretariat: EC-84/S/2 (dated 13 January 2017); EC-87/S/3 (dated 24 January 2018); EC-90/S/1 (dated 18 January 2019); EC-93/S/3 (dated 31 January 2020); and EC-96/S/5 (dated 18 February 2021).

software development activities. As reported in EC-96/S/5, those software development activities were expected to start in the second quarter of 2021. However, due to unforeseen personnel changes within the project team, it did not prove possible to start those software development activities. The Secretariat has therefore paused the project, while ensuring that there is full documentation of progress to date. Once the recruitment of replacement personnel has taken place by the end of 2022, the Secretariat will review the current VIS project management plan, including planned project milestones, and resume implementation of the project.

Data analytics

5.   In 2021 and 2022, the Secretariat continued to expand the use of the modern Qlik Sense data analytics tool in place of the older COGNOS tool for the purpose of creating reports and dashboards to support other verification-related business processes. These reports and dashboards focus on analysing data related to verification areas, such as Article III and VI declarations. These reports include the use of visualisations in official-series documents, such as the status report on the performance of the revised methodology for the selection of other chemical production facilities for inspection (S/1931/2021, dated 22 February 2021) and verification-related information on the OPCW Catalyst platform (such as the list of States Parties registered for the Secure Information Exchange (SIX)). In 2022, the Secretariat began using NPrinting, a Qlik Sense add-on module with advanced visualisation capabilities, in order to streamline the process of producing Article VI inspection mandates.

Enterprise content management system

6.   In 2021 and 2022, the Secretariat continued preparatory work for the roll-out of the enterprise content management (ECM) system to business areas involved in the creation and use of verification-related documents. Work continues to further develop the ECM system to capture and manage declarations submitted by States Parties, to manage documents related to routine missions, and to migrate records from legacy systems such as the Document Tracking System module of VIS (VIS-DoTS) and the Electronic Documents Management System (EDMS). In addition, work is ongoing to integrate ECM with other business systems, such as the VIS-Declarations module and the Data Warehouse—the latter system is designed to collate data from various systems so as to permit their analysis and facilitate reporting. The ECM system is expected to improve the management of classified information and thus to streamline other verification-related business processes involving such information.

Declaration software applications

7.   In 2021, 54 States Parties submitted their annual declarations on past activities for the preceding year in an electronic format. Of those States Parties, 29 used the Electronic Declarations Tool for National Authorities (EDNA), 20 States Parties used the Electronic Declaration Information System (EDIS), which superseded EDNA in 2020, and five States Parties used their own electronic tools for the preparation and submission of their annual declarations. In 2021, the Secretariat continued to provide training on the use of EDIS by virtual conferences due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.   In 2022, 53 States Parties submitted their annual declarations on past activities for the preceding year in an electronic format. Of those States Parties, 24 States Parties used EDNA, 24 States Parties used EDIS, and five States Parties used their own electronic tools for the preparation and submission of their annual declarations. In 2022, the Secretariat resumed providing in-person training on the use of EDIS.

9.   The second version of EDIS was released to States Parties in September 2021. This version included the further digitalisation of Article III-related activities with the introduction of declarations and reports for old chemical weapons. In December 2021, a minor EDIS patch (version 2.1) was released that included general system improvements and which was aligned to the updated declaration resources for States Parties released on 1 January 2022 (S/2018/2022, dated 25 January 2022).

Secure Information Exchange software application

10.   The SIX platform, which provides a secure system for the transmission of both classified and unclassified material, was first made available to States Parties in July 2014, as reported in Secretariat Note S/1192/2014 (dated 1 July 2014). By the end of 2021, 61 States Parties had registered to use the system, in comparison to 60 States Parties at the end of 2020. In the course of 2021 and 2022, the Secretariat conducted several virtual bilateral meetings with representatives of States Parties to assist them with the SIX registration process and to continue the promotion of the system.

11.   In the course of a typical calendar year, the number of documents received by the Secretariat from States Parties' National Authorities through the SIX system peaks around the deadlines for the submission of declarations of past and anticipated activities. The number of issues reported by SIX users also peaks during this period. Most of these issues relate to problematic SIX accounts. In 2022, the intention is to introduce a routine SIX account health-check process before each declaration round, whereby such problematic SIX accounts are identified, and remedial steps can be taken in consultation with the SIX account holders ahead of the declaration submission deadline.

12.   In 2021, the Secretariat conducted a routine biennial replacement of its public key, which was then made available to SIX users via the Catalyst platform. The two-factor authentication mechanism required to use the SIX system was also renewed at the same time for all users. Both activities ensure that the SIX system remains up to date and will continue to support secure communications between States Parties and the Secretariat.

Further information

13.   The Secretariat will continue to report on the VIS, focusing on key developments in existing and new projects, and will continue to look for ways in which to develop processes so as to boost efficiency for the OPCW.

14.   Information on the VIS, EDIS, and SIX is updated periodically and can be found on the OPCW Catalyst platform. Questions about each of these platforms can also be sent to their respective dedicated email addresses: vis@opcw.org, edis@opcw.org, and six@opcw.org. States Parties can also make enquiries by calling the OPCW central telephone number (+31 (0)70 416 3000) and asking for the EDIS or SIX help desk.

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