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### **REPORT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR VUSIMUZI PHILEMON MADONSELA CHAIRPERSON OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON TERRORISM TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 103RD SESSION**

1. Mr Chairperson, Director-General, distinguished colleagues, it is my pleasure to provide an oral report of the meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism (OEWG-T) held on 6 July 2023.
2. The meeting featured two presentations and discussion on the multi-component chemical emergency response capacity-building exercise for the Africa region (CHEMEX Africa), which is due to take place in Algiers, Algeria, from 23 September to 4 October 2023. This was followed by my outlining of the concept and planning process for the table-top exercise to be held under the auspices of the OEWG-T in November this year to explore several issues that arose as part of the Group's contribution to the preparatory process for the Fifth Review Conference,<sup>1</sup> which took place from 11 to 15 May 2023.
3. In his opening remarks, the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, recalled that, at the Fifth Review Conference and throughout its preparatory process, much common ground was reached on key issues including the importance of countering chemical terrorism. He commended the participants in the OEWG-T for their active and positive engagement in this regard. He noted that countering chemical terrorism is of increasing importance and that the Centre for Chemistry and Technology would enable the Organisation to more effectively deal with related issues connected with rapid developments in science and technology, such as artificial intelligence. The Director-General expressed gratitude to Canada for its support for the CHEMEX Africa initiative and to the leadership of Algeria for hosting the exercise. Turning to the table-top exercise, the Director-General reiterated the commitment of the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") to supporting the activity.
4. The Working Group was then addressed by H.E. Ambassador Salima Abdelhak, Permanent Representative of Algeria to the OPCW. Ambassador Abdelhak provided a briefing on CHEMEX Africa from the host country perspective, noting that it was co-organised with Algeria under the OPCW Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention, with financial support from Canada. The Ambassador characterised the aim of the exercise as being to enhance the capabilities of African States Parties, including on incidents and attacks carried out by terrorist groups and non-State actors. It is built on an approach centred on broad cooperation and collaboration and would involve a diverse range of stakeholders. The Ambassador

<sup>1</sup> Review Conference = Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.



described the exercise as an opportunity to demonstrate protective measures, to foster outreach, and to share awareness, bringing together African States Parties as well as partners from outside the continent. The exercise underlines the importance of regional cooperation and the necessity for expanding such initiatives to other regions. For the exercise to achieve its objectives, Algeria, through its National Authority, is providing comprehensive technical and logistical support, in cooperation with the National Training and Intervention Unit of the Civil Protection Service, the National Institute of Criminalistics and Criminology of the National Gendarmerie, and the Algerian Company of Fairs and Exports (SAFEX), among others. In closing, Ambassador Abdelhak invited representatives of the States Parties and all relevant role players to attend and participate in the exercise.

5. Mr Babatunde Olowookere, Programme Officer with the Assistance and Protection Branch of the Secretariat's International Cooperation and Assistance Division, then briefed the Working Group on preparations for CHEMEX Africa from the Secretariat's perspective. He described the background to the initiative in the context of the Secretariat's activities in support of Article X of the Chemical Weapons Convention, noting the threat of chemical weapons use by non-State actors in Africa, in a time of interregional trade, porous borders, challenges concerning legislation, and the absence of adequate surveillance in the chemical industry. He explained that the overall aim of the initiative is to address this challenge through strengthening preparedness and response capacities among African States Parties by developing capabilities to mitigate, investigate, respond to, and recover from chemical incidents. The South-South aspect of the exercise is important, with States Parties from the Africa subregions actively involved, along with regional partners including the African Union and AFRIPOL. Mr Olowookere went on to describe the five phases in the two-week exercise and the preparations to date, together with partners including Canada, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Switzerland, and the host country, Algeria. Finally, Mr Olowookere expanded on the expected outcomes and benefits of the exercise: in the near-term, this should lead to active engagement of new technical partners in the annual delivery of specialised training to African first responders; and in the medium- to longer-term, it should significantly strengthen the capacity of African States Parties to respond to and reduce the effects of chemical incidents.
6. Participants commended the host country, Algeria, the partner countries, and the Secretariat on the initiative. Some described the support their States Parties were providing, while others highlighted issues such as the need to capture lessons learned, ensuring a diverse group of stakeholders, seizing the opportunity to make progress on universality, considering linkages with non-proliferation and anti-terrorism efforts more broadly, and expanding similar initiatives to other regions.
7. Following this, I presented on plans for the OEWG-T's table-top exercise. I began by recalling the background to the exercise in the inputs made by the OEWG-T to the preparatory process for the Fifth Review Conference. The exercise would aim to identify and address potential gaps in preparing for and responding to a terrorist attack involving the use of chemical weapons. Findings could potentially inform efforts to enhance prevention strategies, streamline and strengthen response, and improve investigation efforts. I described the timeline for the preparation of the exercise, from July to November 2023, along various tracks such as scenario building, logistics,

and incorporating learnings from CHEMEX Africa. I also presented some possible options regarding the number of types of participants, the involvement of experts from States Parties in constructing the scenario and facilitating the exercise, as well as the possibility of including observers and having a post-exercise review. I asked delegates to indicate any support they may be able to provide to the process and undertook to keep them informed on progress.

8. Several participants expressed support for the table-top exercise, with several of them indicating that they could provide expertise in facilitation or other areas, financial resources, or other inputs. Some referred to their national capabilities and experiences of potential chemical terrorist attacks. Others requested that the Chairperson provide a briefing note on the table-top exercise, including details on the type of expertise or other inputs that could be offered by States Parties.
9. Under the agenda item “Any other business”, one participant shared useful information on their State Party’s recent experience of an attempted terrorist attack involving toxic chemicals, pointedly cautioning that the potential for such incidents should never be underestimated and noting that action could be taken in that specific incident because of the existence of a robust legislative regime.
10. In closing, I indicated that I would keep delegations informed on progress, including through providing a briefing note on the information requested by some participants.
11. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Director-General, Deputy Director-General, Permanent Representatives, and delegates for their ongoing active participation in the work of the OEWG-T and to the presenters for providing invaluable food for thought.
12. The next meeting of the OEWG-T is scheduled to take place prior to the 104th Session of the Executive Council. The date of the meeting will be communicated closer to the time.
13. Thank you, Mr Chairperson.