



Eighty-Fourth Session
7 – 10 March 2017

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NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
ADVISORY BOARD ON EDUCATION AND OUTREACH IN 2016**

1. Paragraph 18 of the Terms of Reference of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO), as adopted by the Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”) at its Twentieth Session (Annex to C-20/DEC.9, dated 3 December 2015), provides for the submission by the Director-General of an annual report to the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) and to the Conference on the ABEO’s activities. This is the first such report, covering the activities of the ABEO since its establishment in early 2016, including its First and Second Sessions. The reports of those sessions (ABEO-1/1, dated 29 April 2016 and ABEO-2/1, dated 6 October 2016) serve as the basis for this report.
2. Following the decision to establish the ABEO, a selection process for its members was instigated in conformity with the ABEO’s terms of reference. Following the receipt of nominations from States Parties (as called for in Note S/1323/2015, dated 4 November 2015), the Director-General appointed 15 experts to serve on the Board for an initial term of three years (EC-81/DG.9 C-21/DG.2, dated 18 February 2016). In accordance with its terms of reference, at its First Session the Board elected Dr Jean Pascal Zanders of Belgium as its Chairperson and Dr Edith Valles of Argentina as its Vice-Chairperson.
3. In 2016, its first year of operation, the Board concentrated on team building, on establishing its programme and practices of work, and on several specific issues on which the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) sought advice. In establishing its programme of work, the Board ensured a balance between the conceptual or strategic part of its mandate and the more practical side.

First Session of the Board

4. The ABEO’s First Session took place over two days, on 28 and 29 April 2016. Given that it was the first time the Board was meeting, the Secretariat devised a draft agenda and circulated in advance to Board members a number of background documents concerning the Organisation’s education and outreach activities that were designed to help to orient the initial work of the Board.
5. In opening the First Session, the Director-General noted that the establishment of the Board represented a new step in the OPCW’s evolution, and that the Board’s key objective—connecting people to the work of the OPCW and further giving



them a stake in its success—would underpin the Organisation’s future success. Underlining that the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) was facing new and, in many cases, unforeseen challenges, the Director-General told the Board that education and outreach would be a critical element of the Organisation’s work to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

6. During its First Session, the Board heard from a number of units across the Secretariat with responsibilities that touch on education and outreach matters. Board members were also afforded an opportunity to present to the Board their individual work and its potential to inform the education and outreach activities of both the Board and the Organisation.
7. At the conclusion of its First Session, the Board decided to establish several informal working groups to carry out work in the intersessional period on the following topics:
 - (a) establishing common definitions, objectives, and operational strategies to guide the work of the Board;
 - (b) the OPCW’s 20th anniversary;
 - (c) the proposed OPCW Visitor Centre (work subsequently discontinued);
 - (d) outreach at the regional, national, or local level;
 - (e) the OPCW website evaluation; and
 - (f) a project on youth outreach funded by the European Union (EU).

Intersessional activities

8. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat established an electronic platform designed to enable the Board members to collaborate virtually. The platform enabled the creation of separate areas for work in the informal working groups listed above.
9. In May and June 2016, several Board members were invited by the Secretariat to attend the regional meetings on education and outreach that were organised in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran (23 and 24 May), Johannesburg, South Africa (13 and 14 June), and Asunción, Paraguay (28 and 29 June). During those meetings, the participating Board members made presentations to representatives of States Parties on the ABEO’s mandate, activities and plans, and on their own vision and experience with regard to education and outreach activities of relevance to the Convention.
10. In 2016, the ABEO Chairperson provided briefings on the Board’s work to the Council at its Eighty-Third Session (13 October) and to the Conference at its Twenty-First Session (1 December). He also led a session devoted to education and outreach during the OPCW Open Day event (4 May).

Second Session of the Board

11. The ABEO's Second Session took place from 4 to 6 October 2016. With the consent of the Director-General, it was decided during the intersessional period that the ABEO's sessions would in future take place over three days rather than two, given the need to ensure that the Board had sufficient time to carry out its work during its regular sessions.
12. The Director-General opened the Board's Second Session, noting that the potential for the Board to positively influence the implementation of the Convention would only grow, particularly against the background of the serious challenges facing the Convention. The Director-General also underlined the need for the Board to continue to draw on outside expertise as it carried out its strategic and practical mandate.
13. At its Second Session, the Board took a decision regarding its approach to the presence of observers at its meetings (in having observers, the Board is unique among OPCW subsidiary bodies). The Board confirmed that the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC)—representing chemical practitioners—and the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA)—representing the chemical industry—would be invited to observe all future sessions. Other expert observers would be invited to the Board's future sessions according to their expertise and their potential to contribute to the issues to be discussed at each session.
14. In addition, the Board took several decisions intended to support its future work, including on definitions of education and outreach, and with regard to its intersessional working groups, which would work in the following areas:
 - (a) assisting National Authorities;
 - (b) developing the theme "Prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons";
 - (c) developing strategies to engage specific stakeholder groups;
 - (d) developing strategies to deal with immediate challenges to the Convention;
and
 - (e) engaging other international organisations.
15. The Board at its Second Session also decided to continue the working groups focused on regional, national, and local outreach, on youth outreach, and on longer-term strategies.

Status of ABEO recommendations

16. In the reports of its First and Second Sessions (ABEO-1/1 and ABEO-2/1), the Board made several recommendations. The following paragraphs briefly describe the recommendations and the steps taken by the Secretariat to respond to them.

E-learning

17. In ABEO-1/1, the Board recommended that the Secretariat develop tools to evaluate its e-learning modules and common approaches and strategies regarding e-learning. In response to this recommendation, the Secretariat formed a cross-divisional working group to examine the OPCW's existing e-learning offering, particularly from a technical point of view. That group continues its work, and it has introduced some preliminary changes to the system to reduce technical barriers to participation in OPCW e-learning and to harmonise evaluation. In the medium term, the Organisation will look to revamp its e-learning offering, including the platform on which it is hosted.

Publicising condemnations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons

18. In ABEO-2/1, the Board recommended that the OPCW promptly publicise any communications it receives condemning the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. In response to this recommendation, the Secretariat issued a press release on 29 November 2016 (available at <https://www.opcw.org/news/article/chemical-industry-councils-and-scientific-societies-condemn-use-of-chlorine-as-weapon/>). The Secretariat will publicise any future such communications.

The OPCW's 20th anniversary

19. The Board made a number of recommendations regarding the commemoration of the OPCW's 20th anniversary (as set out in paragraph 9.20 of ABEO-2/1). Those recommendations have been fed into the Secretariat's planning process for the 20th anniversary and are being considered as part of that process.

EU-funded project on youth outreach

20. The Board recommended that the Secretariat organise a competition for secondary school and university students, with the aim of building a network of "OPCW Youth Ambassadors". The Secretariat is in the process of finalising a project plan, to be executed in 2017, which takes into account this recommendation and subsequent advice from the ABEO's informal working group on this subject.

Civil society engagement

21. At its second session, the Board recommended that outreach and public diplomacy activities be developed during the sessions of the Conference to encourage interactions among stakeholder communities and between those communities and the Secretariat and States Parties. The Secretariat will consider this recommendation, in concert with the ABEO, when organising future sessions of the Conference.

Public diplomacy strategy

22. The Board recommended that the OPCW's public diplomacy strategy be reviewed. This recommendation forms part of the strategic plan of the Public Affairs Branch of the External Relations Division, and will be taken up in 2017.

23. The Secretariat will continue to engage with the Board on the status of its recommendations, including through briefings during the Board's regular sessions.

Future work of the ABEO

24. As a new subsidiary body, the ABEO necessarily focused in some measure in 2016 on bedding down its practices and procedures and coming to common understandings on the scope of its work. At the same time, it has considered an impressive array of subjects, ranging from long-term strategies to immediate actions in support of the OPCW's education and outreach activities. The Director-General considers that the variety of issues currently addressed by the Board corresponds to current needs, and is grateful to all members for their commitment to the Board and for their work during the Board's first year of operation.
25. The ABEO will meet again in March and August 2017 for its Third and Fourth Sessions. During the intersessional periods, the Board members will continue to work together in the working groups mentioned above, using the online collaboration tool made available for that purpose by the Secretariat. The Director-General looks forward to seeing the results of that work, which should be practically focused and results-oriented, and to having greater engagement with the work of the Board on the part of States Parties. As the ABEO continues its work, the Director-General looks forward to the development by the Board of a portfolio of specific education and outreach activities and projects.