

**NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL****UPDATE ON THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S READINESS TO CONDUCT A CHALLENGE INSPECTION OR AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE****Introduction**

1. The First Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the First Review Conference”) requested the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) to “continue maintaining a high standard of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, to keep the Council informed about its readiness, and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection” (paragraph 7.91 of RC-1/5, dated 9 May 2003).
2. The Second Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Second Review Conference”) reiterated this request to the Secretariat (paragraph 9.90 of RC-2/4, dated 18 April 2008).
3. The First Review Conference “stressed the importance of investigations of alleged use or threat of use of chemical weapons. For such situations, the OPCW must have the capacity, and be ready at all times, to investigate the need for follow-on action by the OPCW and by individual Member States” (paragraph 7.100 of RC-1/5). The Second Review Conference reiterated this concern (paragraph 9.105 of RC-2/4), requesting the Secretariat to keep the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) informed about its readiness.
4. The Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention made two requests of the Secretariat with respect to the conduct of a challenge inspection (CI) or an investigation of alleged use (IAU) (paragraph 9.111 of RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013). The first was that the Secretariat continue to improve the standard of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”). The second was to keep the Council informed about its readiness and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU.
5. The Secretariat has previously submitted to the Council several Notes on its readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU (EC-36/DG.5/Rev.1, dated 17 February 2004; EC-41/DG.10, dated 2 June 2005; EC-46/DG.6, dated 26 June 2006; EC-49/DG.11,



dated 1 June 2007; EC-54/DG.9, dated 25 September 2008; EC-58/DG.8, dated 28 September 2009; EC-62/DG.8, dated 22 September 2010; EC-66/DG.10, dated 8 September 2011; EC-70/DG.12, dated 12 September 2012; EC-74/DG.15, dated 25 September 2013; EC-76/DG.11, dated 12 June 2014; and EC-79/DG.12, dated 3 June 2015; EC-82/DG.12, dated 7 June 2016; and EC-85/DG.13, dated 31 May 2017).

6. This Note concentrates on the activities the Secretariat has undertaken since the last update (EC-85/DG.13), and highlights issues that still require further consideration and attention by States Parties and by the Secretariat.

The Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell, the Contingency Operation Core Team, the Mission Support Group, and the Situation Centre

7. Since 2016, the Secretariat has assigned a cadre of inspectors to the Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell (CBCP), with the goal of strengthening States Parties' capacity to respond to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, maintaining the Secretariat's preparedness to provide assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons, as well as leading and supporting the conduct of contingency operations, including CIs and IAUs, in accordance with Articles IX and X of the Convention or the mandate of the Council.
8. The Secretariat's preparedness has been further enhanced by the creation of a Contingency Operation Core Team. In order to maintain and enhance the Secretariat's ability to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations, the CBCP provides regular training to the Core Team members, drawing from staff across the Inspectorate Division and other parts of the Secretariat, on operational procedures and activities and lessons learned from past missions.
9. In order to properly manage the command and control elements of a CI or IAU or other contingency operations, the Secretariat has developed a Mission Support Group (MSG), along with other operational working groups that meet to work through and actively pursue solutions to complex operational problems in case of a request for CI, IAU, or other contingency operation. The Secretariat has also streamlined and supplemented the former Operations Centre with new technology and appropriate staffing to create a Situation Centre (SitCen), capable of actively managing CI and IAU missions, along with the routine and other non-routine missions taking place at any given moment. The newly created SitCen provides 24-hour mission support, develops and maintains a comprehensive common operating picture, ensures secure and reliable communications, and provides information analysis to facilitate senior management decision making in support of CIs, IAUs, or any other contingency operations.

Operational procedures and training of inspectors

10. Inspectorate training in 2017 continued to maintain the mandatory qualifications required under the Quality Management System for the conduct of inspection activities and for the preparation of inspectors and inspection team leaders to perform inspection duties for "non-routine" missions, such as CIs and IAUs, or other contingency operations. There was a continued focus on training inspectors for activities in non-permissive and conflict-affected environments.

11. In 2017, a group of new inspectors came on board. The group (Group Q) consisted of seven new inspectors who joined the OPCW in October 2017 and completed their initial mandatory training by the end of December 2017. In 2017, the CBCP coordinated or delivered 1,764 training days, inclusive of the mandatory initial training and refresher courses. The training programme comprised 58 individual training courses. Participants included inspectors and Secretariat staff, some of whom attended several training courses, some of which were part of the Secretariat's capacity-building programmes organised for States Parties.
12. The CBCP regularly conducts the Secure and Safe Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) training course, which is a requirement by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security for operations in high-risk environments. The most recent training courses, based on the lessons learned during the OPCW's recent contingency operations, were conducted in February and March 2018 in cooperation with the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, Italy, under the supervision of the OPCW SSAFE instructors. The courses comprised a sequence of different scenarios in high-risk environments that might occur in CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations, simulating real situations. A total of 20 members of the Secretariat participated in these courses, both in the form of initial training or as a refresher module. As at 11 June 2018, 71 inspectors and other staff members had the SSAFE certification, which qualifies them for operations in high-risk environments such as may be present during CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations.
13. As reported previously, the Secretariat has embarked on other relevant training activities. In addition to regular training, the courses that are particularly relevant to CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations include:
 - (a) non-destructive evaluation training;
 - (b) use of self-contained breathing apparatus;
 - (c) command and control of operations;
 - (d) explosive remnants of war awareness training;
 - (e) toxic chemical training with live chemical warfare agents;
 - (f) reconnaissance and sampling; and
 - (g) advanced negotiation and report writing.
14. New training programmes have also been implemented, aimed at reinforcing the Secretariat's capabilities to conduct contingency operations by enhancing the inspectors' current skill sets. These started in 2016 and have continued throughout 2017 and 2018. These programmes include the forensic awareness training courses provided by the Netherlands Forensic Institute, criminal investigation techniques training provided by the Institute for International Criminal Investigations, and interview skills training in 2017. Furthermore, a course for advanced negotiations techniques and report writing, tailor-made for contingency operations, was provided in February 2018. These courses were provided through contributions from Canada and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

15. As previously, the experience gained during the preparation and conduct of recent missions such as the OPCW Mission in Syria, OPCW fact-finding missions, technical assistance visits (TAVs), and Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) field exercises has helped the Secretariat to continue to improve procedural and short-notice deployment issues. Moreover, there has been a focus on command and control, communications, information collection and analysis, management of a large deployed team, and executive risk assessment processes, which are skills applicable to a CI or an IAU. To enhance preparedness for a CI, the Secretariat conducted an in-house CI refresher training and table-top exercise on 18 and 19 July 2017. Participants were selected from various divisions including the Inspectorate, Verification, Office of the Legal Adviser, and the Office of Strategy and Policy. The training was aimed at providing an updated assessment of the fundamentals of CI in Article IX, as well as Part X and relevant elements of Part II of the Verification Annex to the Convention (hereinafter “the Verification Annex”), as well as experiences and lessons learned from recent contingency operation deployments. The table-top exercise was developed to present the participants with the challenges of analysis and decision making for a range of complex issues that could be expected in a CI scenario.
16. From 24 to 28 July 2017, the Secretariat conducted a rapid field deployment exercise in parallel with a training course in command and control. This exercise in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was conducted with the assistance and participation of personnel from the United Kingdom National Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Centre, Counter-Terrorism Policing and from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) Porton Down. The first part of the training concentrated on elements of command and control, and was followed by the field activities that focused on an assistance scenario. This involved a requesting State Party confronted with a clandestine laboratory apparently designed to produce chemical agent, together with a munition filling and storage area and chemical weapons munitions test area. Exercises were conducted on all elements of the mission, including analysis of the request for assistance from the State Party, mission planning, deployment, testing of standard operating procedures, communications, chemical weapons detection and analytical equipment, and the building of an effective working relationship with the requesting State Party.
17. From 11 to 15 December 2017, the Secretariat conducted a RRAM field deployment exercise in Romania, in which all elements of the RRAM operation were exercised. This included rapid, real-time preparation for deployment, and the subsequent in-country activities that would be required in the event of a State Party requesting this type of assistance mission. The exercise was designed to execute all the operational and headquarters elements of a complex RRAM mission, including continuous communications between the RRAM team and the headquarters MSG. The main operational elements included: receipt and assessment of the request for assistance; activation of the RRAM mechanism and assembly and deployment of the team; selection and on-site use of equipment; safety and security and chemical reconnaissance; detection and on-site characterisation of chemicals; the taking of samples for off-site analysis; and the provision to the requesting State Party of advice on incident scene management, including the conduct of interviews with potential victims and witnesses, the provision of advice for the initial treatment of victims, and decontamination.

18. From 5 to 9 February 2018, the Secretariat conducted the second RRAM field deployment exercise, this time in Serbia, in which all elements of the RRAM operation in the field were exercised, using a different scenario. The exercise included the required in-country activities in the event of a State Party requesting assistance against the use of chemical weapons by a non-State actor.
19. From 21 to 25 May 2018, the OPCW participated in the multinational Balkan Response exercise, which was organised by the Serbian Ministry of Defence at the CBRN training centre in Kruševac, Serbia. The exercise scenario was based on short notice preparation and deployment of a team of inspectors to conduct an investigation of an alleged use of chemical weapons by a non-State actor. During the exercise, the team set up independent communication lines with the headquarters, performed toxic entry in the incident area to identify the extent of chemical contamination, conducted interviews with potential victims and witnesses, and reviewed relevant documents and records.
20. From 18 to 22 June 2018, the Secretariat conducted a contingency operation enhancement exercise at the CBRN training centre in Kruševac, Serbia. The exercise was based on experience gained in recent contingency operations and included the participation of 10 members of the Inspectorate contingency operation core team. The training was delivered by members of the CBCP, in close cooperation with other units of the Secretariat. During the exercise, the participants took part in four days of field training which included activities related to CIs and IAUs as well as other scenarios related to contingency operations. These activities included working in toxic environments with live chemical agents by establishing a command and control post, field reconnaissance and investigation of an incident involving the use of toxic chemicals, digital photography, development of a sampling strategy, and taking samples and preparation for transport of samples for off-site analysis. The exercise focused on many recognised operational procedures used in CIs and IAUs.

Equipment and laboratories

21. Since last year's report (EC-85/DG.13), the Secretariat has informed States Parties of the procurement of a number of new items of approved inspection equipment that conform to the operational requirements and technical specifications approved by the Conference of the States Parties. The Secretariat has informed the States Parties of the newly procured items of approved equipment through Notes S/1524/2017 (dated 15 August 2017), S/1546/2017 (dated 18 October 2017), and S/1618/2018 (dated 19 April 2018). Among the new items are the combo pen auto-injectors, as a medical counter measure for chemical weapons nerve agent, new digital cameras, as well as new laptop computers. Additional new equipment includes a new (explosion-proof) flashlight that provides illumination in places where explosive mixtures of gases or vapours may exist and encrypted USB memory sticks to protect the confidential materials collected during CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations. These items have helped to increase the operational readiness and capabilities of the OPCW, particularly in respect of possible cases of CIs and IAUs.
22. Based on the experience gained from the deployment of contingency operations at short notice in recent times, the OPCW Equipment Store has the necessary supplies and equipment and requisite preparedness to support an inspection team deployment

within the time frames specified in the Convention, or to meet other short-notice operational requirements.

23. The Secretariat maintains a network of designated laboratories available to carry out the off-site analysis of samples in support of a CI, an IAU, as well as contingency operations. The list of designated laboratories is updated following proficiency testing. The current list of laboratories designated for environmental sample analysis can be found in Note S/1616/2018 (dated 18 April 2018), and the current list of laboratories designated for the biomedical sample analysis can be found in Note S/1516/2017 (dated 11 July 2017).

Issues requiring further action by the Secretariat

24. CIs and IAUs are key deterrent elements of the Convention, aimed at eliminating the risk of production, storage, and use and threat of use of chemical weapons. Since entry into force of the Convention, no CIs or IAUs have been requested by a State Party. The Secretariat, however, needs to maintain a high degree of readiness through, inter alia, the conduct of CI and IAU exercises.
25. In December 2017, the Secretariat conducted a fully fledged contingency operation exercise (based on a RRAM request scenario) that included commonalities similar to what would happen in CIs and IAUs involving the Secretariat's headquarters MSG, with an element of short-notice deployment. As a result of the December 2017 exercise and a similar exercise in February 2018, the Secretariat has compiled a matrix of actionable items for future training and preparedness for CI, IAUs, or other contingency operations. This initiative will ensure that the Secretariat's staff will be well prepared for any CI or IAU.
26. Representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) participated in the OPCW contingency operation exercise as observers in December 2017. The Secretariat will continue its dialogue regarding contingency operations with other relevant international organisations. These include the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, WHO, and INTERPOL.
27. Taking into account the lessons learned from recent contingency operations and exercises, additional processes were initiated to maintain preparedness to successfully conduct a CI or IAU. Internal measures by the Secretariat include the development of the skills of a relatively new workforce (52% of inspectors have less than two years of experience within the OPCW), and the creation and enhancement of the CBCP and an extended group of trained inspectors as the Contingency Operations Core Team. The Secretariat also enhanced the rapid deployment concept by selecting and training other Secretariat staff to be prepared and trained to deploy and conduct CIs and IAUs at short notice. This concept was further supported by actively adopting a "leaner team" approach, based on lessons learned from recent contingency operations. This approach takes accumulated competencies from the Secretariat and allows for a smaller and more adaptable team to be created and deployed, with less impact on routine missions. In this context, the Secretariat fully appreciates the support of

Canada, Romania, Serbia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in providing training opportunities in 2017 and 2018.

28. Moving forward, the Secretariat will continue its efforts towards maintaining preparedness to conduct a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission by addressing several facets of staffing, preparedness procedures, interagency cooperation, and required technological means. These future considerations include looking into the recruitment process to hire staff with the required competencies, working with other relevant United Nations agencies to facilitate knowledge sharing and interagency cooperation, developing and facilitating relevant training programmes, and using technologies to assist in the successful completion of CI and IAU missions.
29. The Secretariat is currently pursuing bilateral agreements with interested States Parties to provide independent air transport on short notice, in order to ensure the rapid deployment of teams. Efforts will continue to receive more support in providing independent air transport means and pre-approved flight clearances for non-scheduled aircraft to further solidify Secretariat's preparedness to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions in the future.

Issues requiring further action by States Parties

30. As mentioned in previous reports, the ability of the OPCW to respond promptly to requests for a CI and/or an IAU could be seriously affected by a lack of standing arrangements that require action by States Parties in accordance with Part II of the Verification Annex:
 - (a) In accordance with paragraph 10 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to provide designated OPCW inspectors with multiple-entry visas that are valid for at least two years. As at 11 June 2018, 135 States Parties (70.3%) had either issued, or promised to issue, two-year multiple-entry visas, or had no visa requirements for OPCW inspectors travelling with a United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP); 31 States Parties (16.2%) had issued multiple-entry visas valid for one year (or less); and 26 States Parties (13.5%) had either not responded or had provided incomplete general visa information that does not apply to OPCW inspectors travelling on UNLPs. It may be worthwhile recalling that States Parties that impose visa requirements on UNLP holders could also consider agreeing to a waiver of the standard visa requirements for UNLP holders in the event of a CI or an IAU.
 - (b) In accordance with paragraph 16 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to designate the points of entry (POEs) that are to be used by mission teams. As at 11 June 2018, 135 States Parties had provided information regarding POEs.
 - (c) In accordance with paragraph 22 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to inform the Secretariat of the standing diplomatic clearance number (SDCN) for non-scheduled aircraft. As at 11 June 2018, 47 States Parties had provided SDCNs on a permanent basis, while 28 had provided information on expediting them in the event that a requirement arises. It should be noted that an additional 16 States Parties provide SDCNs on an annual basis.

- (d) In accordance with paragraph 44 of Part II of the Verification Annex, inspectors shall have the right to communicate with the Headquarters of the Organisation and to use their own two-way system of communications between team members during inspections. Accordingly, States Parties must inform the OPCW of the radio frequencies available for use by the inspection teams for such purposes. As at 11 June 2018, only 86 States Parties had provided frequencies or had given the Secretariat authorisation to use OPCW default frequencies and/or had provided conditions for their use. Of these 86 States Parties, 48 updated, or confirmed or provided information on an expedited method for obtaining the necessary frequencies in 2018. Finally, 108 States Parties have never provided any records regarding radio frequencies.

Conclusion

31. The full range of operations, field exercises, in-house workshops, and training courses that have taken place during the reporting period has augmented the preparedness of the Secretariat to conduct effective CIs, IAUs, or other contingency operations at short notice. The Secretariat will maintain its preparedness to deploy to operations at short-notice and will continue to plan and conduct exercises in cooperation with a variety of international actors, with the support of States Parties. This will enhance the preparedness and capabilities of the Secretariat in the event of a CI, IAU, or other contingency operation. The Secretariat reiterates its appreciation for the assistance that States Parties have extended thus far, and hopes that this will continue. As in the past, the Secretariat would like to encourage States Parties to come forward to jointly organise, participate in, and conduct exercises, training, and other operational activities.

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