OPCW   **Technical Secretariat**

NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

**REPORT OF THE THIRD USER-GROUP FORUM FOR THE
ELECTRONIC DECLARATION TOOL FOR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES (EDNA)**

Introduction

1. The electronic declaration tool for National Authorities (EDNA) version 2.1 was released in June 2010, and has since been used by States Parties to declare, in accordance with Article VI of the Chemical Weapons Convention, annual declarations of anticipated activities (ADAAs) and annual declarations of past activities (ADPAs).

2. The recent round of declarations has been completed, and the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") has observed that States Parties have shown a continued interest in using EDNA to prepare and submit their electronic declarations. In addition, they remain interested in further enhancements of EDNA software and in the provision of additional functionalities to facilitate the preparation and submission of declarations.

3. In order to improve support for EDNA users, to assess what functionalities need to be improved in future releases, to facilitate planning of training activities, as well as to provide States Parties with an opportunity to share their own experiences in the domain of electronic declarations, the Secretariat organised the third EDNA user-group forum on the margins of the Sixty-Ninth Session of the Executive Council (from 10 to 13 July 2012).

4. The third EDNA user-group forum was held at the OPCW Headquarters on 11 and 12 July 2012. Thirteen representatives from 10 States Parties attended the forum, some of whom travelled to The Hague to attend this event.

5. The agenda included updates from the Secretariat on the topics related to electronic declarations. The EDNA 2.5 pre-release version was discussed, as was the issue of how to ensure the secure electronic transmission of declarations—a topic that States Parties had indicated during the second user-group forum to be of high priority. The importance of this topic was highlighted by the fact that it was the main theme of the third user-group forum. More recently, the same subject featured during discussions

of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) for the Preparation of the Third Review Conference.[1]

6.   It is clear that EDNA has already become an essential business tool in the declarations process for a growing number of States Parties. The Secretariat continually seeks to make improvements to EDNA and supports key tasks in order to build on this trend. Crucial areas requiring future improvements in the domain of electronic declarations were identified by the States Parties and are summarised below.

Report

7.   The agenda for the first day of the user-group forum was dedicated to describing the work that the Secretariat was carrying out to design and implement enhancements to EDNA; these proposed changes were based on feedback, comments, and requests from the States Parties.

8.   The pre-release of the new version of EDNA application (version 2.5) was presented to the participants and key features were highlighted, especially in regard to how the enhancements correlated to the requests received earlier from the States Parties. In addition, the participants were provided with compact discs (CDs) of the pre-release version of the new EDNA application and were asked to evaluate it and provide feedback to the Secretariat by 6 August 2012, with a view to finalising the development work and producing a final and stable version for release in September 2012, in time for preparation of declarations of anticipated activities for 2013.[2]

9.   The States Parties expressed their appreciation for the efforts that the Secretariat had put into improving the EDNA application and welcomed the corrections and enhancements included in the new version.

10.   The Secretariat reported on the status of development of a key missing functionality in EDNA, which is support for declarations of Schedule 1 chemicals and activities. In the context of this presentation, an early version of the prototype was demonstrated by the Software Development and Business Integration Section of the Information Services Branch (ISB).

11.   The States Parties thanked the Secretariat for the work conducted in this area and reiterated the need for inclusion of this functionality in future versions of EDNA. They also underlined the benefits of this development, in that they would no longer have to maintain two separate business processes or software applications—one for the electronic declarations and another for the hard copies for the declarations of Schedule 1 facilities. Furthermore, some of the States Parties offered help and assistance to the Secretariat in the process of developing and testing the new software module for Schedule 1 declarations.

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[1]   Third Review Conference = The Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention

[2]   The new version was released on the OPCW Extranet on 20 September 2012.

12. The principal agenda item for the second day of the user-group forum was the subject of the secure electronic transmission of declarations; the presentation of this topic was followed by an open panel discussion on this and any other matters of interest.

13. The Secretariat introduced the topic by giving a presentation on the background to the initiative on the secure electronic transmission of declarations, by reiterating requests from the States Parties related to this area, and by highlighting the expected benefits in terms of improvements of the verification regime, in particular in terms of the timely submission of declarations. The work the Secretariat has conducted in order to respond to the needs of States Parties was then provided, as well as how it planned to continue this work in the near future.

14. The results of the survey conducted in preparation for the user-group forum were also presented. In total, 40 States Parties have responded to the survey, a majority of which have expressed the view that this is an important topic and that the Secretariat has provided a good way forward. The survey results also suggested that, despite some reservations and conditions expressed (mostly related to the level of security when it comes to transmission of confidential data, as well as need for cost efficiency and compatibility with existing information technology (IT) tools and systems), there are no major constraints which would prevent States Parties from utilising such a new system for secure electronic transmission of declarations, should it be put in place by the Secretariat. Comments and feedback provided by the States Parties in their responses to the survey offered a useful insight to their needs and made a valuable contribution to the process of design and development of the requested improvements.

15. In the final part of this session, the Office of Confidentiality and Security presented an initial risk analysis of the envisaged technical solution, which had been conducted from the information-security point of view. In addition, the Operations, Infrastructure and Support Section of the ISB gave a presentation on a high-level design of a candidate technical solution, together with further explanations of the tools, methods, and principles that will govern the design of the final product.

16. States Parties' representatives welcomed the presentations and status reports and congratulated the Secretariat on this initiative. In addition, several States Parties expressed their willingness and readiness to further assist to the Secretariat in implementing a system for the secure electronic transmission of declarations. This assistance would take the form of the sharing of their experiences and their involvement in testing and reviewing pilot versions and prototypes.

17. During the final hour of the event, States Parties participated in an open panel discussion on various topics of mutual interest, focusing on the key area of electronic transmission, but also touching on various other relevant areas involving the subject of electronic declarations.

18. One of the other key features States Parties requested in relation to the development of EDNA was the capability to enable distributed use of the software application, in order to support various scenarios in which it would be possible to collect and harmonise declaration data coming from various sources within a State Party (e.g. different government institutions, agencies, regional offices, and so on). This feature has already been requested in the past, and these requests were reiterated by

several of the States Parties during this forum. The Secretariat informed the States Parties that it has performed an initial analysis in order to identify the complexities involved in developing this functionality. The actual implementation will depend on the completion of pending tasks, such as the release of the final version of EDNA 2.5 and development of the Schedule 1 module.

19. With regard to EDNA-related training and support, the Secretariat clarified the fact that, due to time and logistical constraints, it was not possible to organise training sessions for the new version during the forum, but that dedicated training would be organised during the Seventeenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in November 2012. This, in combination with the e-learning modules that the Secretariat has started developing for EDNA users, is expected to provide a solid basis for States Parties that are new users or those that are interested in refreshing their knowledge as they prepare their ADPAs and their ADAAs.

20. In their closing remarks, the participants of the forum thanked the Secretariat for developing EDNA and for taking the initiative to improve this software tool. They were keen to see further improvements that would facilitate the process of preparing electronic declarations.

Other activities

21. An EDNA demonstration session was also organised after the discussions of the final day had concluded, and was held to assist States Parties that had not been able to attend on the first day. In addition, following the forum, members of the EDNA project team met individually with several States Parties representatives to discuss their feedback in more detail.

22. The Secretariat also informed participants that it had revised the electronic material available online through the OPCW Extranet. Documents relevant to the third user-group forum had been uploaded, along with the EDNA 2.5 pre-release version. The support documents and user manuals had been updated and the structure and the organisation of the material had been improved. In addition, the participants were informed about the Secretariat's e-learning initiative and the intention of the Secretariat to provide more e-learning material for EDNA users through the OPCW Extranet or the OPCW Learning Management System.

Conclusion

23. The third EDNA user-group forum has clearly contributed to keeping the momentum going in terms of encouraging States Parties to submit their declarations in electronic form. In addition, the forum contributed to maintaining closer links with the user community—a fact evident in the interactive discussions that took place during and after the meeting. EDNA has already become a key business tool in the declarations process for a growing number of States Parties. It is important that continued support and development are provided in the long term, and that the views and needs of the States Parties are heard and taken in consideration.

24. Several of the States Parties expressed an interest in being involved in testing future releases of this software tool. Their interest would be beneficial to the user community and to the Secretariat. The States Parties also asked to be more involved

in detailed discussions in regard to business requirements, particularly for Schedule 1 declarations and in regard to the development of a system for secure electronic transmission of declarations. The Secretariat will engage with the States Parties in the pilot testing of future releases and in the consideration of additional features that could enhance this software tool.

25.   Further questions or comments in terms of EDNA can be sent to the following:

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