



Opening Remarks by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias, at the Workshop on Assessing and Enhancing Capacity of Analytical Laboratories from African and GRULAC Member States

As delivered on 2 June 2020, The Hague, Netherlands

Ambassador Peter Wilson,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you to this workshop for African and GRULAC States Parties. Your participation reflects a firm dedication to strengthening your laboratories' capacities, and working towards joining the OPCW network of designated laboratories.

This is the first online capacity-building workshop hosted by the International Cooperation and Assistance programme. It demonstrates the OPCW's unwavering commitment to supporting its States Parties, despite the challenges imposed by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

The outbreak has impacted countries, organisations, communities, and citizens around the world. The OPCW has quickly adapted to these unprecedented times to continue to deliver for States Parties. This workshop is the first in a series of online capacity-building events.

Looking ahead, we will refine our expertise in hosting online events, e-learning courses, and remote training as an integral part of our capacity-building programmes. The experience and lessons learned from this workshop will provide a useful basis to build on.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This workshop concludes the first phase of a project to assess and enhance the capabilities of analytical laboratories in African and GRULAC States Parties, with the aim of becoming OPCW designated laboratories. This is one of many initiatives that the OPCW has launched with this aim, in order to strengthen the verification regime, as well as regional security.

The analysis of chemicals under the Chemical Weapons Convention is an important part of our collective efforts. It is critical to the detection of chemicals for control and investigation.

Modern analytical techniques alongside proper skills and institutional expertise enable chemists to accurately detect such chemicals in a variety of environmental and biomedical matrices. These abilities are critical for a variety of stakeholders engaged in the effective implementation of the Convention.

Customs authorities, forensic police, the scientific community, quality control, and military institutions require these skills to analyse chemicals relevant to the Convention. Representatives of most of these stakeholder groups are participating in this project.

Furthermore, assuring the highest level of analytical skills is fundamental to the operation of the OPCW network of designated laboratories. This network is the linchpin of the OPCW verification regime and integral to our ability to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

Today, we are joined by representatives of the designated laboratories from Finland and Spain. I thank them for their contribution to this project, as well as their continuous support to the OPCW's capacity building initiatives.

I am pleased to welcome several laboratories from Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil, and Chile who are pursuing accreditation as OPCW designated laboratories. This project will help the selected laboratories through targeted measures and partnerships with more advanced and designated laboratories in other States Parties.

The selected laboratories have already benefited from tailor-made assistance comprised of three analytical chemistry courses organized by VERIFIN in Finland, LAVEMA in Spain, and the OPCW Laboratory in the Netherlands. I highly commend the efforts of these institutions, as well as the governments of Finland and Spain for their ongoing support to the African and GRULAC regions.

I would also like to recognise the International Cooperation and Assistance Division and the OPCW Laboratory for supplying the expertise to implement this successful project.

I wish to thank the United Kingdom in general for its important active role as a member of the Organisation and specifically today for its generous voluntary contribution which has made this workshop possible.

I am confident that this project will continue to progress, due to the commitment of the OPCW and its States Parties, despite these challenging times.

In closing, I wish all participants a fruitful workshop over the coming two days. I look forward to further successful developments in the promotion of the peaceful uses of chemistry.

Thank you.
