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OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE NINETY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Third Session of the Executive Council.
2. At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Andrea Perugini for his continuing able leadership of the Council.
3. We commence the first Council session of the year by recognising our achievements in 2019 and preparing for the challenges in the year ahead. Last year concluded with a historic moment. For the first time since the Convention's entry into force, the Conference of the States Parties, at its Twenty-Fourth Session, adopted two decisions to amend the schedules of chemicals listed in the Convention. This event demonstrates States Parties' determination to ensure that the Convention remains strong, relevant, and adaptable to new challenges.
4. States Parties were notified of the approval of these changes through a note verbale issued on 10 December (NV/ODG/221841/19, dated 10 December 2019). The Secretariat issued Note S/1820/2019 on 23 December 2019, containing the consolidated text of the adopted changes. The Secretariat issued a second Note on 14 January 2020 (S/1821/2019/Rev.1) to provide States Parties with guidance about the implementation of these decisions. These changes will enter into force for States Parties on 7 June 2020, following the timelines laid out in Article XV of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Secretariat stands ready to assist States Parties and their National Authorities in the implementation of these decisions.
5. The Conference of the States Parties also approved the 2020 Programme and Budget. This budget will allow the Secretariat to implement its growing portfolio of mandated activities with no increase in State Party assessed contributions.
6. The Conference further approved a decision (C-24/DEC.11, dated 28 November 2019) to move to a biennial programme and budget cycle to support longer-term programmatic planning and organisational efficiency. This new approach reflects States Parties' intention to ensure that the OPCW has sufficient and sustainable resources to carry out its broad range of activities.



7. We will soon be moving into the 2021 Programme and Budget planning cycle. Again, the Organisation will face the challenge of delivering additional mandated activities under a zero nominal growth budget. The continued constraints of zero nominal growth have engendered a steady erosion of the OPCW's regular budget in real terms. In the last year, the Secretariat has incurred an unforeseen increase in staff costs. This increase resulted from changes to the United Nations salary scale for General Service staff, retroactive to 2017, as well as increases in October 2019 and February 2020 to the post adjustment multiplier for the Netherlands, from 31% to 40%, by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). In 2020, these increases will result in a potential shortfall in staff costs of approximately EUR 5 million. The Secretariat has put temporary measures in place to mitigate the impact, but a sustainable solution is needed. These increases are mandatory. Should States Parties continue to maintain a zero nominal growth-based budget for 2021, the Secretariat will have to call on States Parties to choose among programmatic priorities in order to focus and adapt the Programme and Budget to this reality.
8. There are critical priorities, however, that demand immediate and sustained resources. As I have repeatedly highlighted to the Council, the Secretariat faces serious challenges with regard to cyberattacks. The Secretariat is the target of increasingly sophisticated and frequent attempts to penetrate and compromise its information systems. Any loss in the confidentiality, availability, or integrity of information of States Parties or the Secretariat as a result of a successful cyberattack would have serious impacts on the Organisation. I thank States Parties for their voluntary contributions to the trust fund that has been established for improvements in cybersecurity. This funding supports steady investments and improvements in cybersecurity. Despite this progress, the Secretariat has reached the limit of the gains that can be achieved with these resources. A sustainable cybersecurity programme, including modern and capable cyberdefence tools, is needed. This programme will require dedicated staff and regular budget funding beginning as soon as 2021. The next draft budget, to be presented to States Parties in July, will incorporate these elements for the States Parties to consider.
9. The security landscape is evolving and the Organisation must have the resources and capabilities to adapt. The OPCW will continue to intensify its focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and responding to emerging threats.
10. Yesterday's meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism examined the capability of the OPCW's Situation Centre to detect chemical terrorism incidents. It also focused on the international legal framework on countering chemical terrorism. Finally, it was an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with other international organisations, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. A Note summarising the OPCW's contribution to global anti-terrorism efforts was made available to States Parties in advance of this session of the Council (EC-93/DG.10, dated 20 February 2020).
11. Achieving our long-term goal of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will depend on retaining and developing our technical capabilities. This represents a complex challenge, taking into account the high pace of progress observed in science

and technology. Knowledge management is an essential component of our efforts to ensure that core expertise is identified, developed, preserved, and effectively used.

12. Knowledge management, and other important matters relating to organisational governance, have been discussed in a very productive way under the leadership of Ambassador I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja of Indonesia and Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador. I thank both Ambassadors for giving the Secretariat the opportunity to present ongoing work in areas that are essential for the OPCW to remain fit for purpose.
13. I have repeatedly highlighted the importance I attach to gender balance and geographical diversity. With regard to the tenure policy, I wish to emphasise that the existing modalities at the OPCW are the most stringent ones compared to similar, other non-career organisations, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Increased flexibility is needed to retain essential skills and experience. I therefore encourage delegations to further actively engage in the facilitation process, should the Council decide to extend it.
14. The ChemTech Centre project to upgrade our existing OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store is central to the effort to keep the OPCW fit for purpose. It demonstrates the commitment of the OPCW to using science and technology to implement and uphold the Convention. Upgrading these facilities to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology will be critical to achieving our long-term goals in this regard.
15. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 29.3 million have been received from almost 40 States Parties and the European Union, in addition to a personal contribution. I sincerely thank all contributors for your relevant political and financial support. This EUR 33.5 million project is scheduled for completion in 2022. This year will be dedicated to the design and tendering processes and completion of all necessary permitting.
16. An additional EUR 4.2 million will be needed by July 2020 to complete the project on time. The broad support received so far reflects its potential to generate tangible benefits for all States Parties. I renew my appeal to all States Parties from every geographical region to financially support this project, with pledges that suit their situation. A briefing on the status of the project will take place tomorrow. A Note outlining the significant progress that has been made on this project was released yesterday (S/1859/2020, dated 9 March 2020).
17. With regard to direct cooperation between States Parties and the Secretariat, a bilateral agreement on privileges and immunities between Cambodia and the OPCW entered into force on 4 March 2020. Experience has demonstrated the operational value of these agreements. I invite States Parties that have not yet concluded or ratified an agreement to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Chairperson,

18. In July 2019, I authorised an investigation into possible breaches of confidentiality related to the investigation by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) into allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Douma on 7 April 2018. On 6 February 2020, I briefed States Parties on the findings. The investigation determined that two individuals violated their obligations concerning the protection of confidential information, and that a breach of the OPCW's Code of Conduct had occurred. My statement and a report on these findings have been made available to States Parties and published on the OPCW's public website. At the briefing, I invited States Parties to address any questions on this matter to the Secretariat in writing. For the purposes of transparency, and consistent with the non-confidential nature of the briefing, the questions, along with the Secretariat's responses, have been circulated to all States Parties. The Secretariat is now taking actions to strengthen the confidentiality regime, including enhanced, mandatory training for all members of the Secretariat and an in-depth review of relevant internal legislation.
19. As was agreed following a request by States Parties during the July 2018 session of the Executive Council, the Secretariat has provided briefings to States Parties regarding the Syrian Arab Republic chemical dossier ahead of each regular session of the Council. The last briefing took place on 4 March, during which presentations were given on all related activities.
20. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has been examining a number of incidents regarding allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, the FFM has continued to analyse the information collected from its deployments in November and December 2019. The FFM is awaiting sample analysis results from the last deployments, is planning further deployments, and will report on the results in due course.
21. On 23 December 2019, the Secretariat sent a note verbale to the Russian Federation regarding an incident involving the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 24 November 2018. This note verbale requests access to samples, information, and witnesses that are highly relevant to the FFM's investigation. Studying all available information relating to allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria is a paramount principle of the work of the FFM. The information reportedly in the possession of the Russian Federation should therefore be considered before a report on this incident is to be issued.
22. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has also continued its work to clarify gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies arising from the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration on its chemical weapons programme and subsequent submissions. The twenty-third round of consultations, initially planned to begin on 11 February 2020, should take place after this session of the Executive Council. A note entitled "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC-93/HP/DG.1, dated 6 March 2020) has been made available to the Council.
23. The Secretariat remains committed to ensuring the full implementation of all declaration requirements and to assisting the Syrian Arab Republic in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention as well as the relevant decisions of the OPCW

policy-making organs and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. At present, considering all identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, the Secretariat remains unable to confirm that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete.

24. In accordance with Council decision EC-83/DEC.5, adopted on 11 November 2016, the Secretariat is preparing to conduct the seventh and eighth rounds of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). On 7 November 2019, the Syrian Arab Republic sent a note verbale with an explanation regarding the presence of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical detected in a sample collected by the Secretariat during the third round of inspections at the Barzah SSRC facilities in November 2018. On 20 February, the Secretariat responded to this note verbale requesting additional information from the Syrian Arab Republic. The Secretariat will continue to engage with the Syrian National Authority to seek further clarification on these findings. The Council will be informed accordingly. Also pursuant to the same decision, and together with the Syrian National Authority and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), the Secretariat continues to monitor the security situation at and around airfields in Hama (Hama airbase) and Latakia (Humaymim airbase) to deploy a team as soon conditions allow.
25. The Conference of the States Parties at its Fourth Special Session adopted a decision entitled “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use” (C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018). In accordance with paragraph 24 of that decision, I have provided my latest report to the Executive Council (EC-93/DG.11, dated 24 February 2020).
26. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continued to conduct its investigations, reached out to States Parties requesting their cooperation, and is in the process of concluding its work on the first three incidents under investigation. Consistent with decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 adopted by the Conference at its Fourth Special Session, the Secretariat will provide a report on the investigations to the Executive Council and the United Nations Secretary-General in the forthcoming weeks.
27. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement concluded between the OPCW, UNOPS, and the Syrian Arab Republic. This agreement facilitates the Secretariat’s mandated activities in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the deployments of the FFM and DAT, and inspections of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) facilities. A meeting of the Steering Committee to discuss the next extension of the Tripartite Agreement took place on 5 and 6 February 2020 in Damascus. An agreement to a further six-month extension until 30 September 2020 is now being finalised.
28. Pursuant to Council decision EC-M-43/DEC.1, dated 24 July 2014, regarding the destruction and verification of 12 declared chemical weapons production facilities, the Secretariat has been monitoring and maintaining the remote monitoring systems installed at four sealed underground structures on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. In line with the Council decision, the mandate related to those activities will come to an end in the coming days, in March 2020. As a result, the

Secretariat is currently planning for the removal of the monitoring equipment from these four underground structures.

29. Turning to destruction, as at 29 February 2020, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of 70,668 metric tonnes (MT), or 97.7%, of all declared chemical weapons.
30. As at the same date, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,133 MT, or 94.11%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 5.89% of its stockpile by no later than 2023.
31. In Libya, the project to clean up the former chemical weapons site in Ruwagha was completed on 26 January, as confirmed by the Libyan National Authority.
32. China and Japan have continued to make progress on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) at various sites in China. As at 31 December 2019, around 83,650 items of ACW had been recovered, of which 57,701 had been destroyed.
33. A fifth phase of the OPCW Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa—commonly known as the “Africa Programme”—has been launched for the period from 2020 to 2022. Following extensive consultations with African States Parties, the programme includes tailor-made activities in line with the region’s needs. It features unique innovations aimed at securing greater engagement, ownership, and sustainability of its impact at the national, subregional, and regional levels.
34. As all of you are aware, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus—COVID-19—a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. Prior to this declaration, I established an internal Task Force chaired by the Deputy Director-General and composed of representatives from across the Secretariat to monitor this situation. The Inspectorate and Verification Divisions have been working to identify mitigating measures to ensure the implementation of the inspection plan for 2020, with minimal operational and budgetary impact. At this time, any postponement of deployments is not expected to affect the implementation of the annual inspection plan. However, considering the current evolution of the situation, it can be expected that adjustments may be needed. Such adjustments may present challenges to completing all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020. I will communicate any such decisions in a timely manner to the Executive Council and all relevant stakeholders.
35. The International Cooperation and Assistance Division (ICA) also adopted certain measures with regard to the annual work plan, already prepared in collaboration with States Parties that have agreed to jointly host capacity-building events with the Secretariat, which will be adjusted according to the evolution of the COVID-19 situation. ICA has and will continue to further engage with hosting States Parties in the lead-up to planned activities. Participants and their National Authorities will be apprised of any changes to the schedule or other necessary measures.
36. The health and safety of all OPCW staff is paramount, both at OPCW Headquarters and on duty travel around the world. The Secretariat will continue to monitor the

situation and take all reasonable measures to protect our staff, while minimising the impact of the outbreak on the implementation of the OPCW's programme in 2020. I will report again on this matter at the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Council.

Mr Chairperson,

37. Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to inform the Council of the passing away of one of our colleagues. On 8 February, while on mission, one of our colleagues sadly passed away of natural causes. I thank the States Parties and all international institutions that provided support and assistance to the Secretariat and to our colleague's family during this difficult time.

Mr Chairperson,

38. My report to the Ninety-Third Session is detailed. The full text of my statement will be circulated to delegations as an official document of this session.

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