



NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

IMPACT OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON THE ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

1. This Note is intended to update States Parties on the specific measures that have been taken by the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) in response to outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and to inform States Parties about its actual and potential impact upon the work programme of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2020.
2. The health and safety of all staff of the OPCW is paramount, both at OPCW Headquarters and on duty travel around the world. On 10 March 2020, at the Ninety-Third Session of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”), the Director-General in his opening statement (EC-93/DG.18, dated 10 March 2020) informed the Council, inter alia, of the measures taken by the Secretariat to respond to the outbreak and spread of COVID-19, which on 30 January 2020 was declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO). On 11 March 2020, the WHO characterised the disease as a pandemic. On 13 March 2020, the Director-General sent Note Verbale NV/ODG/223008/20 to all States Parties, informing them of the measures taken by the Secretariat to protect OPCW staff, taking due account of the guidance of the WHO and the Dutch health authorities.
3. The Secretariat is at the same time making all efforts to minimise, to the extent possible, the impact of this situation on the implementation of the OPCW’s activities and programme in 2020. To this end, the internal Task Force established by the Director-General on 27 January 2020 continues to monitor and assess the situation and to make recommendations to the Director-General on appropriate measures.

CONTINGENCY STAFFING

4. As conveyed in the above-mentioned note verbale, from 16 March to 3 April 2020, only personnel deemed critical are required to carry out their essential functions. This means that less than 10% of the OPCW workforce is working at OPCW Headquarters at present. This major reduction in working staff significantly impacts upon a number of Secretariat work processes, including the processing and translation of official documents. While every effort is being made to continue core work, additional time required for the completion of such processes should be anticipated. Therefore, delays may be expected with respect to a number of activities.



5. Group visits and those of private visitors to OPCW facilities have been suspended until further notice.
6. Further, all non-essential travel worldwide, including for training, has been postponed until 1 May 2020, and will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow.

VERIFICATION

7. The Secretariat has postponed all Article VI inspections in all States Parties until 1 May 2020. Those Article VI inspections that are affected will be rescheduled, if possible, to take place later this year when circumstances allow, taking into account any national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 as well as the health and safety of inspectors. Further to the Director-General's note of caution in his opening statement to the Council at its Ninety-Third Session (EC-93/DG.18), it will be challenging to complete all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020.
8. With respect to Article IV inspections, the Secretariat will continue its verification activities at the chemical weapons destruction facilities, taking into account the applicable health and safety regulations of the inspected State Party. The Secretariat continues to consult closely with the National Authority of the concerned State Party in this regard.
9. Inspections related to Article V and Council decision EC-67/DEC.7 (dated 16 February 2012) in respect of former chemical weapons production facilities will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
10. Inspections related to abandoned chemical weapons have been postponed, and will be rescheduled in consultation with the concerned States Parties. The Secretariat continues to consult with both concerned States Parties in this regard.
11. Inspections related to old chemical weapons have been postponed and will be rescheduled to take place later in the year when circumstances allow, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
12. On 13 March 2020, the Secretariat informed the Syrian Arab Republic through a note verbale that, in view of the recent events related to the COVID-19 outbreak, and in line with measures announced by the Dutch authorities, inter alia, all scheduled deployments and missions of the Secretariat, including to the Syrian Arab Republic, had been postponed until further notice. The Secretariat will monitor the situation closely and will keep the Syrian Arab Republic and States Parties duly informed.
13. The Secretariat continues to receive and evaluate States Parties' annual declarations on past activities for 2019.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

14. All capacity-building events with States Parties have been postponed until 1 May 2020. The International Cooperation and Assistance Division will continue to engage with hosting States Parties to explore the options for rescheduling such events,

if possible. As the evolution of the spread of the COVID-19 disease remains unclear, however, it may be challenging to reschedule all planned activities. It is therefore anticipated that further adjustments to the annual working plan will need to be made. These adjustments will be communicated by the Secretariat to States Parties and to all stakeholders in a timely manner.

NEXT STEPS

15. The Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and to adopt appropriate mitigating measures, and will keep States Parties apprised of any relevant developments.

--- 0 ---