



Introductory Remarks by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias, at the Inaugural Meeting of the OPCW Africa Programme Steering Committee

As delivered on 26 June 2020, The Hague, Netherlands

Mr Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to address the inaugural meeting of the Steering Committee of the OPCW Africa Programme. I welcome all Committee members and observers. It makes me very happy to be with you.

The committee was successfully constituted and launched under the fifth phase of the Programme. And I am very pleased about that.

This body is a very necessary dedicated forum of dialogue and coordination with the major stakeholders of African support. I underline the Secretariat's continued commitment to support the work of this committee.

This inaugural meeting was initially scheduled to take place in Togo, earlier this month, during the meeting of African National Authorities. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all National Authority regional meetings this year have been postponed and are being reformulated in a virtual format.

Mr Chair,

The Note of the Secretariat on the Fifth Phase of the Africa Programme was cleared by the Executive Council at its session last March. This officially marked the launching of a new cycle of the Programme for three years (from 2020 to 2022).

Taking due account of the guidance of the WHO and the Dutch health authorities, the Secretariat has been adopting timely measures to effectively respond to the situation posed by the pandemic.

Seeking to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the continuity of the business at the OPCW, the Secretariat minimised the staff present in its premises and postponed almost all travel worldwide, including for training, an important feature of the Africa Programme.

To mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the work of the Organisation, the Secretariat switched gradually to remote work. In this context it has been exploring every possibility to continue delivering capacity-building activities as possible for this year. This is currently allowing a number of postponed events to be adapted into remote learning modalities.

In addition, the Secretariat is continuing to explore the feasibility of different ways to continue offering States Parties our support under the current circumstances. For this purpose, the Secretariat is enhancing its internal capacity, including through new and innovative means of programme delivery. Notwithstanding the above efforts, it may be challenging for the Division

of International Cooperation and Assistance to be able to complete all of its activities originally planned for 2020.

In parallel to the delivery of training, during the past period the Secretariat has been working in specific initiatives under the fifth phase of the Africa Programme. One of these initiatives is the development of a series of full-fledged project proposals for extra budgetary funding. These projects address the needs of the African States Parties in relation to the CWC implementation.

Should these projects be implemented, they will contribute greatly to streamlining the impact of the Africa Programme. The Secretariat will hold on Wednesday next week an online fundraising event, to present those proposals to the States Parties and to seek contributors. The Deputy Director-General and the Coordinator for the Africa Programme will provide the committee during today's meeting with a preview of these projects.

I acknowledge, with high appreciation, the generous political and financial support provided by the Czech Republic, Germany, United Kingdom, United States and the European Union in the projects I have mentioned. I am pleased to see them join the Committee as observers.

During the past period we conducted an important impact assessment campaign, focusing on the capacity building activities delivered for Africans in 2019. This assessment provided unique insights on the extent and nature of the efforts made by African Alumni to follow up on their participation in the OPCW capacity building events.

Mr Chair,

I wish to take the opportunity to touch on the topic of ChemTech Centre. As you are aware, the Centre is envisioned as a place where the States Parties and the Secretariat could come together to study, learn, train, and work in common purpose towards a more safe, secure, peaceful, and prosperous world. The Secretariat is committed to delivering this facility for States Parties, and to making every effort to do so on-time and on-budget.

Despite the Covid-19, the project has been making progress in the past months. The architectural project for the building is ready, and the procedure for the selection of the constructor has already started. We expect the contract to be signed in the first quarter of 2021.

We are still missing EUR 3 million from the projected budget. I would like to reiterate the call to African States Parties that have not yet contributed, to invest in the future of this Organisation by supporting the ChemTech Centre project with voluntary contributions, because it will benefit to a great extent the African Member States.

In closing, I should like to reiterate the Secretariat's commitment and dedication to supporting the African States Parties and to addressing, through the Africa Programme, their needs in the context of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I wish the Steering Committee every success in its work.

Thank you.
