

**NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL****UPDATE ON THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S READINESS TO CONDUCT
A CHALLENGE INSPECTION OR AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE****Introduction**

1. The First Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the First Review Conference”) requested the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) to “continue maintaining a high standard of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, to keep the Council informed about its readiness, and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection” (paragraph 7.91 of RC-1/5, dated 9 May 2003).
2. The Second Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Second Review Conference”) reiterated this request to the Secretariat (paragraph 9.90 of RC-2/4, dated 18 April 2008).
3. The First Review Conference “stressed the importance of investigations of alleged use or threat of use of chemical weapons. For such situations, the OPCW must have the capacity, and be ready at all times, to investigate the need for follow-on action by the OPCW and by individual Member States” (paragraph 7.100 of RC-1/5). The Second Review Conference reiterated this concern (paragraph 9.105 of RC-2/4), requesting the Secretariat to keep the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) informed about its readiness.
4. The Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention made two requests of the Secretariat with respect to the conduct of a challenge inspection (CI) or an investigation of alleged use (IAU) (paragraph 9.111 of RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013). The first was that the Secretariat continue to improve the standard of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”). The second was to keep the Council informed about its readiness and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU.

5. The Secretariat has previously submitted to the Council several Notes on its readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU (EC-36/DG.5/Rev.1, dated 17 February 2004; EC-41/DG.10, dated 2 June 2005; EC-46/DG.6, dated 26 June 2006; EC-49/DG.11, dated 1 June 2007; EC-54/DG.9, dated 25 September 2008; EC-58/DG.8, dated 28 September 2009; EC-62/DG.8, dated 22 September 2010; EC-66/DG.10, dated 8 September 2011; EC-70/DG.12, dated 12 September 2012; EC-74/DG.15, dated 25 September 2013; EC-76/DG.11, dated 12 June 2014; and EC-79/DG.12, dated 3 June 2015; EC-82/DG.12, dated 7 June 2016; EC-85/DG.13, dated 31 May 2017; EC-88/DG.19, dated 29 June 2018; and EC-91/DG.15, dated 28 June 2019).
6. This Note concentrates on the activities the Secretariat has undertaken since the last update (EC-91/DG.15), and highlights issues that still require further consideration and attention by States Parties and by the Secretariat.

The Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell, the Non-Routine Missions Core Team, the Mission Support Group, and the Situation Centre

7. Since 2016, the Secretariat has assigned a cadre of inspectors to the Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell (CBCP), with the goal of strengthening States Parties' capacity to respond to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, maintaining the Secretariat's preparedness to provide assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons, as well as leading and supporting the conduct of non-routine missions, including CIs and IAUs, in accordance with Articles IX and X of the Convention or the mandate of the Council.
8. The Secretariat's preparedness has been further enhanced by the creation of a Non-Routine Missions Core Team. In order to maintain and enhance the Secretariat's ability to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions, the CBCP provides regular training to the Core Team members, drawing from staff across the Inspectorate Division and other parts of the Secretariat, on operational procedures and activities and lessons learned from past missions.
9. In order to properly manage the command and control elements of a CI or IAU or other non-routine mission, the Secretariat has developed a Mission Support Group (MSG), along with other operational working groups that meet to work through and actively pursue solutions to complex operational problems in case of a request for a CI, IAU, or other contingency operation. The Secretariat has also streamlined and supplemented the former Operations Centre with new technology and appropriate staffing to create a Situation Centre (SitCen), capable of actively managing CI and IAU missions, along with the routine and other non-routine missions taking place at any given moment. The SitCen provides 24-hour mission support, develops and maintains a comprehensive common operating picture, ensures secure and reliable communications, and provides information analysis to facilitate senior management decision-making in support of CIs, IAUs, or any other non-routine missions.

Operational procedures and training of inspectors

10. Inspectorate training in 2019 and 2020 continued to maintain the mandatory qualifications required under the Quality Management System for the conduct of inspection activities and for the preparation of inspectors and inspection team leaders

to perform inspection duties for “non-routine” missions, such as CIs and IAUs, or other non-routine missions. There was a continued focus on training inspectors for activities in non-permissive and conflict-affected environments.

11. In 2019, a group of 14 new inspectors (Group R) joined the OPCW and completed all mandatory training in order to fulfil the required standards. In 2019, the CBCP coordinated or delivered 1,832 training days, inclusive of the mandatory initial training and refresher courses. The training programme comprised 32 individual training courses, and participants included inspectors and Secretariat staff members. A number of inspectors and staff attended several training courses, some of which were part of the Secretariat’s capacity-building programmes organised for States Parties.
12. The CBCP regularly conducts the Secure and Safe Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) training course, which is a requirement of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security for operations in high-risk environments, and Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT). The most recent training courses, based on the lessons learned during the OPCW’s recent non-routine missions, were conducted in July and October 2019, and February and March 2020. SSAFE training activities were conducted in cooperation with the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, Italy, under the supervision of the OPCW SSAFE instructors. The HEAT course was conducted in cooperation with the German Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance in Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, Germany. The courses comprised a sequence of different scenarios in high-risk environments that might occur in CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions, simulating real situations. A total of 15 members of the Secretariat participated in SSAFE training and an additional two in HEAT course, in the form of initial training or as instructors. As at 19 May 2020, 75 inspectors and other staff members had the SSAFE certification, which qualifies them for operations in the high-risk environments that may be present during CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions.
13. As reported previously, since 2016 the Secretariat has implemented new training programmes aimed at reinforcing its capabilities to conduct non-routine missions by enhancing inspectors’ individual skill sets and improving work within the team. These programmes include the forensic awareness training courses provided by the Netherlands Forensic Institute, criminal investigation techniques training provided by the Institute for International Criminal Investigations, and interview skills training courses held in 2018 and 2019. In addition to these specific courses and regular training activities, the courses that are particularly relevant to CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions include:
 - (a) non-destructive evaluation training;
 - (b) use of self-contained breathing apparatus;
 - (c) command and control of operations;
 - (d) explosive remnants of war awareness training;
 - (e) toxic chemical training with live chemical warfare agents;
 - (f) reconnaissance and sampling; and
 - (g) diplomatic interactions.

14. Despite the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and the measures that were subsequently imposed, which had an impact on the planned training activities, the Secretariat managed to swiftly adapt to the new circumstances. Software platforms and the necessary equipment for online work have been arranged and distributed to OPCW staff, who received the necessary training for working from home, making the transition process smooth and swift. These measures have facilitated continuous operation, as well as the conduct and preparation of various online training activities and workshops. Such activities include knowledge-sharing events, the review and development of new quality-management system documents, and online training for newly promoted team leaders, incorporating relevant aspects of preparation and execution of non-routine missions, including CIs and IAUs. An online IAU workshop has been prepared and will be held in July 2020, aimed at expanding the Non-Routine Missions Core Team, preparing its members for a table-top exercise, and implementing lessons learned from the latest experience into the Secretariat's procedures for non-routine missions. Additionally, extensive efforts have been made with a view to enhancing the Secretariat's distance-learning capability, in order to add flexibility and ensure continuity of training. Modules with a direct connection to non-routine missions, such as forensic photography, are currently being developed as part of the preparations for a possible second wave of the COVID-19 virus.

Non-routine missions

15. The experience gained during the preparation and conduct of missions such as the OPCW Mission in Syria, OPCW fact-finding missions, technical assistance visits (TAVs), and Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) field exercises has helped the Secretariat to continuously improve procedural and short-notice deployment issues. Moreover, there has been a focus on command and control, communications, information collection and analysis, management of a large deployed team, and executive risk assessment processes, which are skills applicable to a CI or an IAU. To enhance preparedness for a CI, the Secretariat conducted in-house CI refresher training courses, two workshops, and a table-top exercise in 2019 with participants selected from various Divisions. To enhance preparedness for an IAU, the Secretariat conducted an in-house training course in 2019. All training activities were aimed at providing an updated assessment of the fundamentals of CI and IAU in Articles IX and X, as well as Parts X and XI and the relevant elements of Part II of the Verification Annex to the Convention (hereinafter "the Verification Annex"), as well as experiences and lessons learned from recent non-routine missions. The table-top exercise was developed to present the participants with the challenges of analysis and decision-making for a range of complex issues that could be expected in a CI scenario. The CI workshops and table-top exercise were supported by representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Continuation of IAU training is planned for 2020.
16. From 3 to 7 June 2019, the Secretariat conducted an advanced reconnaissance and sampling training in Bojnice, Slovakia. The training was based on the experience gained in recent non-routine missions and included the participation of nine members of the Inspectorate's Non-Routine Missions Core Team. The training was delivered by members of the CBCP, in close cooperation with other units of the Secretariat. During the exercise, the participants took part in five days of field training, which

- included activities related to CIs and IAUs, as well as other scenarios related to non-routine missions. These activities included working in toxic environments with live chemical agents, reconnaissance and sampling techniques, and documenting the scene using digital photography.
17. From 6 to 21 July 2019, the Secretariat conducted a contingency operation exercise in Canada, as a part of exercise “Precise Response”, organised by the Canadian Armed Forces. Six members of the non-routine mission Core Team participated in the exercise. The scenarios were prepared and delivered by the Canadian Armed Forces. During the exercise, the participants took part in two weeks of field training, which included working in toxic environments with live chemical agents, field reconnaissance and investigation of an incident involving the use of toxic chemicals, digital photography, development of a sampling strategy, and taking samples and preparation for their transport for off-site analysis.
 18. From 19 to 23 August and from 23 to 26 September 2019, the Secretariat conducted an operational planning course in The Hague, the Netherlands. Training included topics and exercises related to planning activities with regard to both routine and non-routine missions, aimed at improving the efficiency of the process. A total of 32 OPCW participants attended the training.
 19. From 30 September to 3 October 2019, the Secretariat conducted a diplomatic interactions course in The Hague, the Netherlands. The training, which was provided by representatives of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was designed to provide an overall knowledge and understanding of international diplomatic interactions. A total of 14 OPCW participants attended the training, which included exercises on report writing and presenting at the diplomatic level.
 20. On 10 and 11 February 2020, training on explosive remnants of war (ERW) with elements of IAU preparation for OPCW staff was conducted at the Royal Netherlands Explosive Ordnance Disposal College in Soesterberg, the Netherlands. The training was aimed at providing awareness of ERW-related issues and the potential hazards related to ERW, as well as providing the knowledge and practical skills applicable in the conduct of non-routine missions. A total of 35 OPCW participants attended the training.

Equipment and laboratories

21. Since last year’s report (EC-91/DG.15), the Secretariat has informed States Parties of the procurement of a number of new items of approved inspection equipment that conform to the operational requirements and technical specifications approved by the Conference of the States Parties. The Secretariat has informed the States Parties of the newly procured items of approved equipment through Notes S/1787/2019 (dated 26 August 2019) and S/1808/2019 (dated 29 October 2019). This additional medical, information technology, recording, and sampling equipment has helped to increase the operational readiness and capabilities of the OPCW, particularly in respect of possible cases of CIs and IAUs and other non-routine missions.

22. Based on the experience gained from the deployment to non-routine missions at short notice in recent times, the OPCW Equipment Store has the necessary supplies and equipment and requisite preparedness to support an inspection team deployment within the time frames specified in the Convention, or to meet other short-notice operational requirements.
23. The Secretariat maintains a network of designated laboratories available to carry out the off-site analysis of samples in support of a CI, an IAU, or other non-routine missions. The list of designated laboratories is updated following proficiency testing. The current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of environmental samples can be found in Note S/1775/2019 (dated 23 July 2019), while the current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of biomedical samples can be found in Note S/1779/2019 (dated 26 July 2019).

Issues requiring further action by the Secretariat

24. CIs and IAUs are key deterrent elements of the Convention, aimed at eliminating the risk of production, storage, and use and threat of use of chemical weapons. Since entry into force of the Convention, no CIs or IAUs have been requested by a State Party.
25. A high degree of readiness is maintained through, inter alia, the conduct of CI and IAU exercises and cooperation with other relevant international organisations. The Secretariat conducted two fully fledged non-routine mission exercises with an element of short-notice deployment in 2017 and 2018, based on a RRAM request scenario. Representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) participated as observers in the exercise held in 2017. Both exercises presented the commonalities expected in IAUs and CIs and resulted in the development of a matrix of actionable items for future training and preparedness for CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions. This initiative is planned to continue in 2020 and will ensure that the Secretariat's staff will be well prepared for any CI or IAU.
26. Following the creation of the CBCP and the preparation of an expanded group of trained inspectors to form the Non-Routine Missions Core Team, the Secretariat enhanced the rapid deployment concept by selecting and training other Secretariat staff to be prepared and trained to deploy in and conduct CIs and IAUs at short notice. Experiences and lessons learned from non-routine missions and exercises have been utilised in order to maintain the preparedness to successfully conduct a CI or IAU with smaller teams that are more efficient and adaptable. This approach will cause less impact on routine missions, once the full operational readiness of prepared response teams has been reached. The Secretariat fully appreciates the support of Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in providing training opportunities in 2019 and 2020.
27. Moving forward, the Secretariat will continue its efforts towards maintaining preparedness to conduct a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission by addressing several facets of staffing, preparedness procedures, enhanced coordination, interagency cooperation, and required technological means. This was achieved by, inter alia, updating the vacancy notices for the recent hiring of new inspectors,

specifically looking for forensic experience and criminal investigation expertise; working with other relevant United Nations agencies such as INTERPOL, the WHO, and the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention to facilitate knowledge sharing and interagency cooperation; developing and facilitating relevant training programmes; and using technologies to assist in the successful completion of CI and IAU missions. Establishing an effective and efficient preparedness requires the necessary human and financial resources. In this context, it is important to note that the current framework for Secretariat workforce management has demonstrated limitations, particularly with regard to ensuring that the OPCW can always attract and retain the human resources necessary to address both routine and emerging requirements in an increasingly dynamic environment in which fewer and fewer potential candidates have chemical weapons experience. Thus, it will be vital to further augment the ability of the OPCW to attract and retain a talented and diverse workforce and to leverage existing resources, while at the same time ensuring an equitable geographical distribution and balanced gender representation within its staff composition.

28. The Secretariat is currently pursuing bilateral agreements with interested States Parties to provide independent air transport at short notice, in order to ensure the rapid deployment of teams. Efforts will continue to receive more support in providing independent air transport means and pre-approved flight clearances for non-scheduled aircraft to further solidify the Secretariat's preparedness to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions in the future. This has proved to be especially important in the case of imposed transport limitations, such as those experienced as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Issues requiring further action by States Parties

29. As mentioned in previous reports, the ability of the OPCW to respond promptly to requests for a CI and/or an IAU could be seriously affected by a lack of standing arrangements that require action by States Parties in accordance with Part II of the Verification Annex:
 - (a) In accordance with paragraph 10 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to provide designated OPCW inspectors with multiple-entry visas that are valid for at least two years. As at 19 May 2020, 135 States Parties (70%) had either issued, or promised to issue, two-year multiple-entry visas, or had no visa requirements for OPCW inspectors travelling with a United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP); 31 States Parties (16%) had issued multiple-entry visas valid for one year (or less); and 27 States Parties (14%) had either not responded or had provided incomplete general visa information that does not apply to OPCW inspectors travelling on UNLPs. It may be worthwhile recalling that States Parties that impose visa requirements on UNLP holders could also consider agreeing to a waiver of the standard visa requirements for UNLP holders in the event of a CI or an IAU.
 - (b) In accordance with paragraph 16 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to designate the points of entry (POEs) that are to be used by mission teams. As at 19 May 2020, 144 States Parties had provided information regarding POEs.

- (c) In accordance with paragraph 22 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to inform the Secretariat of the standing diplomatic clearance number (SDCN) for non-scheduled aircraft. As at 19 May 2020, 24 States Parties had provided SDCNs on a permanent basis, while 14 had provided information on expediting them in the event that a requirement arises. It should be noted that an additional 39 States Parties provide SDCNs on an annual basis.
- (d) In accordance with paragraph 44 of Part II of the Verification Annex, inspectors shall have the right to communicate with the Headquarters of the Organisation and to use their own two-way system of communications between team members during inspections. Accordingly, States Parties must inform the OPCW of the radio frequencies available for use by the inspection teams for such purposes. As at 19 May 2020, 76 States Parties had provided frequencies or had given the Secretariat authorisation to use OPCW default frequencies and/or had provided conditions for their use, or confirmed or provided information on an expedited method for obtaining the necessary frequencies in 2020. Finally, 117 States Parties have not provided any records regarding radio frequencies.

Conclusion

- 30. The full range of operations, field exercises, in-house workshops, and training courses that have taken place during the reporting period has augmented the preparedness of the Secretariat to conduct effective CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions at short notice. The transition to online activities and enhancement of the distance-learning approach ensure the continuity of the capacity-building process and mitigate the disruption caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Secretariat will maintain its preparedness to deploy to operations at short notice and will continue to plan and conduct exercises in cooperation with a variety of international actors, with the support of States Parties. This will increase the preparedness and capabilities of the Secretariat in the event of a CI, IAU, or other non-routine missions. The Secretariat reiterates its appreciation for the assistance that States Parties have extended thus far, and hopes that this will continue. As in the past, the Secretariat would like to encourage States Parties to come forward to jointly organise, participate in, and conduct exercises, training, and other operational activities.