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

Thank you very much, Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council.
2. At the outset, it gives me great pleasure to welcome the new Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez, Permanent Representative of El Salvador. I am confident that the Council will benefit from his experience and diplomatic skills.
3. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Andrea Perugini, Permanent Representative of Italy, for his able leadership of the Council throughout an active and demanding period.
4. Throughout the intersessional period, the Organisation and its Member States have endeavoured to adapt to the unprecedented challenges of the outbreak of COVID-19. As I reported to the Council at its Ninety-Third Session, at the end of January I established an internal task force, chaired by the Deputy Director-General. This body is composed of representatives from across the Secretariat and deals with the impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 on the OPCW's activities.
5. Through a Note issued on 20 March (S/1863/2020), States Parties were informed about the OPCW's operational posture, and the measures put in place to safeguard the health and safety of Secretariat staff and delegates. States Parties were provided with updated information through two additional Notes, published on 17 April (S/1870/2020) and 3 June 2020 (S/1876/2020).
6. The task force has applied an agile and flexible approach to the adaptation of the Organisation's activities to this new and evolving reality, within available resources.
7. During the intersessional period, information technology (IT) solutions have been introduced and developed across the Secretariat to allow work and activities to continue as much as is feasible. This includes secure computers and online collaboration and communication platforms. As a result, the Secretariat has made steady progress across key areas of programmatic activity.



8. Verification at chemical weapons destruction facilities has continued, thanks to modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site. The Secretariat has developed a plan, in close consultation with States Parties and the Industry Cluster, to resume Article VI inspections when circumstances allow.
9. I am pleased to share with you the news that the final design of the project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre, has been completed. Yesterday, the design was made available online to States Parties.
10. The Secretariat has continued to make progress in all areas of the Syrian chemical weapons dossier, including the release of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on 8 April 2020 (S/1867/2020, dated 8 April 2020).
11. The Secretariat has reshaped selected international cooperation and assistance events, so that they may be hosted online.
12. Furthermore, the delivery of this session of the Council in this modality is the result of the diligent preparatory efforts of Secretariat staff, in close cooperation with States Parties, through the Bureau of the Executive Council. As we move forward, we continue to monitor the situation and to develop a phased, conditions-based plan for a gradual return to business as usual.
13. Despite this progress, the COVID-19 outbreak has further exposed the fact that a Budget based on zero nominal growth hinders our ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances when IT investments are needed. At the beginning of the outbreak, the IT platforms and tools allowing us to shift programmatic activities online proved to be outdated. The capability to hold online meetings in a secure, stable, multilingual modality was lacking.
14. Additional capacity-building events and training were reshaped for remote delivery; however, sufficient IT infrastructure was not available to support them. As an emergency measure, the Secretariat had to acquire around 400 protected laptops for staff in order to allow them to work remotely. These acquisitions could only be financed through savings on missions that had been cancelled because of the virus.
15. I would like to underline that resorting to such measures is not sustainable. The consequences of this underinvestment have been felt in the area of cybersecurity. The Organisation has experienced a sharp and sustained increase in reconnaissance and cyberattacks since the last session of the Council.
16. As I have repeatedly highlighted to the Council, a cybersecurity programme, including modern and capable cyberdefence tools, dedicated staff, and sustainable funding is urgently needed. This need was pointed out in the presentation of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2021, which I delivered to States Parties on 3 July.
17. Amidst these challenges, the Secretariat remains focused on resolutely implementing our mandate and delivering for States Parties by continuing to adapt to the evolving global situation.

18. States Parties have also demonstrated their understanding and their capacity to adapt. I wish to express my gratitude to Council members and observers for their flexibility in holding this session of the Council in this adapted modality.
19. I greatly appreciate the leadership of the Chairperson of the Council in guiding the work of the Executive Council Bureau, and also acknowledge the four Vice-Chairpersons for facilitating the deliberations of the regional groups in keeping with the format of this session.
20. Fifty-three States Parties and the European Union have provided statements, including three rights of reply, as a result of States Parties' cooperative efforts.
21. I hope that this session will continue in the same spirit of flexibility and cooperation.

Syrian Arab Republic

22. On 2 July, States Parties received reports and presentations on activities related to the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical dossier prior to this session, in lieu of the briefing by the Syrian Arab Republic normally provided to States Parties ahead of each regular session of the Council.
23. On 13 March 2020, I had informed the Syrian Arab Republic through a note verbale that all scheduled deployments and missions of the Secretariat had been postponed until further notice in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This included missions that were to take place in the Syrian Arab Republic. Although deployments have been suspended during the intersessional period, activities remain ongoing in all aspects of the Secretariat's work related to the Syrian Arab Republic.
24. I wish to inform you that the Secretariat will adapt its reporting to the States Parties starting from the Ninety-Fifth Session of the Council. The number of reports will be reduced, to avoid duplication and overlaps that have been identified. The monthly report on the Syrian Arab Republic will remain the main document containing comprehensive information on all developments in this dossier, in particular on activities of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). This will ensure a frequent flow of information and delivery of updates, both to the Executive Council and to the United Nations.
25. On 8 April 2020, the Secretariat released the first report of the IIT (S/1867/2020), in accordance with the mandate received in the relevant decision by the Conference of the States Parties on 27 June 2018 (C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018).
26. On the same date, I briefed States Parties, together with the IIT Coordinator, through a video message broadcast from the Ieper Room, due to the measures in place in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pursuant to paragraph 10 of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat provided the IIT report to the Executive Council immediately after the briefing, and then to the United Nations Secretary-General, for consideration (EC-94/S/5, dated 8 April 2020).

27. Additionally, on 12 May, the IIT Coordinator and I provided a video briefing to the United Nations Security Council members in New York on the report, at the kind invitation of the Estonian presidency.
28. States Parties will recall that the report concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of sarin as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017, and of chlorine as a chemical weapon at the same location on 25 March 2017, were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force. It is now up to the Executive Council and the Conference of the States Parties to decide on the next steps.
29. The IIT is continuing its investigations into other incidents and will issue further reports in due course.
30. The Secretariat will continue its work on all aspects related to potential and actual use of chemical weapons.
31. I seize this opportunity to remind States Parties of the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons and the voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Chemical Weapons, both established in 2011 by the Conference of the States Parties. I invite States Parties to consider voluntary contributions to this important fund.
32. For over six years, the DAT has continued its work to clarify gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies arising from Syria's initial declaration of chemical weapons and subsequent submissions. So far, 22 rounds of extensive consultations have already taken place. The twenty-third round of consultations, planned to begin on 15 March 2020 in Damascus, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be rescheduled accordingly.
33. An exchange of correspondence between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Secretariat has taken place, in which I have requested further information in accordance with the plan of action for resolution of the outstanding issues, as discussed in October 2019. The Syrian Arab Republic has expressed its full readiness to continue consultations and technical meetings with the Secretariat. Currently, the Secretariat is awaiting the requested information, which will allow it to prepare the next round of consultations as soon as conditions permit.
34. As reported in the Note entitled "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC-94/HP/DG.2, dated 29 June 2020), deterioration of the samples collected by the DAT in October 2019 was observed at the OPCW Laboratory.
35. In order to address this issue, I sent a note verbale to the Syrian Arab Republic on 22 June, containing information on the measures taken by the Secretariat to document and preserve the integrity of seals applied to these samples. Representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic were invited to the OPCW Laboratory, where they received documentation and observed the integrity of the seals. It was proposed that a technical meeting be held with the experts of the Syrian National Authority to agree on the next steps.

36. The Secretariat remains fully committed to ensuring the full implementation of all declaration requirements, and to assisting the Syrian Arab Republic with fulfilling its obligations under the Convention, the relevant decisions of the policy-making organs, and applicable United Nations Security Council resolutions.
37. At present, considering all identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, the Secretariat remains unable to confirm that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted an initial declaration that can be considered accurate and complete.
38. Pursuant to Council decision EC-M-43/DEC.1 (dated 24 July 2014), the mandate regarding the monitoring and maintenance of the remote monitoring systems installed at four sealed underground structures on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic came to an end in March 2020. As a result, on 11 March 2020, the Secretariat contracted a Syrian company for the removal of the monitoring equipment from the underground structures. The conduct of this activity will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on OPCW activities.
39. The FFM has been examining a number of incidents regarding allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and is awaiting sample analysis results from the latest deployments. It is also planning further deployments and will report on the results of its activities in due course.
40. In addition, during the intersessional period, the Secretariat has exchanged notes verbales with the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation regarding information related to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo on 24 November 2018. The Secretariat hosted a technical meeting with both delegations on 28 May 2020, at OPCW Headquarters. During this meeting, the Russian Federation provided some clarifications related to information in its possession. The Syrian Arab Republic is expected to provide further clarifications with regard to information it provided to the FFM. The Secretariat will continue to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic and will inform the Council in due course.
41. 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.
42. A Schedule 2.B.04 chemical was detected during the third round of inspections at the Barzah facilities in November 2018. An exchange of correspondence between the Secretariat and the Syrian authorities with regard to these findings has continued during the reporting period. The Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the Secretariat to close this issue.
43. As mandated by EC-83/DEC.5, the Secretariat has continued to regularly assess whether the security conditions on the ground permit inspections to take place at the airbases of Hama and Hmeimim. These airbases were identified by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, in its third and fourth reports, as being involved in the weaponisation, storage, delivery, and use of toxic chemicals as weapons.

44. Upon receipt of an updated assessment by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security for each of these two sites, I gave instructions for preparations for the inspections to be initiated in early March. The subsequent steps would necessarily include the Secretariat reaching out to the Syrian Government, with a view to securing additional mitigating measures, in order to reduce the risk to an acceptable level and allow the mission to take place. However, a military offensive in East Syria, in the vicinity of the airbases of Hama and Hmeimim, had subsequently intensified, causing the security situation to deteriorate. As a consequence of this development, I decided to suspend this deployment. Consequently, it was no longer relevant to contact the Syrian Government in this regard.
45. The Secretariat will continue to regularly assess the security situation at the two sites, and resume its preparations for deployment, including through contacting the Syrian Government, as soon as the situation improves and the COVID-19 situation allows for resumption of deployments.
46. At the Ninety-Third Session of the Council, I informed States Parties that the Secretariat was taking action to reduce the risks of future breaches of the confidentiality regime. The Secretariat has since completed a benchmarking exercise on the OPCW's confidentiality provisions, compared with those of six other international organisations. The results of the assessment are being analysed.
47. Furthermore, relevant units of the Secretariat are currently conducting a review and update of the Code of Conduct and related policies for addressing breaches, in line with international best practices.
48. On 22 April this year, the Government of Libya, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, reported the alleged use of chemical weapons in Libya, on 18 April. The Secretariat has been in contact with the Libyan Permanent Representation to the OPCW and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) regarding these allegations. At present, the Secretariat is not able to draw any conclusions about the alleged use of chemical weapons on the basis of the information available.
49. As States Parties are aware, any potential deployment by the Secretariat on the territory of a State Party would require prior authorisation from the State Party concerned or a decision by the OPCW policy-making organs. The OPCW Situation Centre continues to monitor the situation. Furthermore, the Organisation continues to liaise with the Libyan Permanent Representation to the OPCW and UNSMIL.
50. I invite all States Parties to share with the Secretariat information potentially relevant to this allegation.
51. Turning to destruction, as at 30 June 2020, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of 70,883 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.03%, of all declared chemical weapons.
52. As at the same date, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,348 MT, or 94.88%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 5.12% of its stockpile by no later than 2023.

53. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations to make progress on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACWs) at various sites in China. Destruction operations and related activities such as excavations and recoveries have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As at 30 June 2020, around 83,650 items of ACWs had been recovered, of which 57,701 ACWs had been destroyed. The Secretariat remains in close contact with China and Japan regarding the latest developments on ACW matters.
54. The Secretariat is developing a plan to resume Article VI inspections once circumstances allow. This plan will take into account national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19, as well as the health and safety of inspectors.
55. The Secretariat has begun consultations with National Authorities, including through the Industry Cluster, in order to identify the parameters within which Article VI inspections could be resumed. However, as announced to States Parties during the intersessional period, it will not be possible to complete all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 virus. Those inspections that are not conducted before the end of this year will be prioritised in 2021.
56. The Secretariat has also been developing and delivering training activities for inspectors through online modalities, including e-learning training modules that are delivered across knowledge-sharing platforms.
57. The OPCW Situation Centre continues to monitor the global COVID-19 situation so as to enable the Secretariat to resume all currently suspended activities once conditions permit.
58. The Conference of the States Parties, at its Twenty-Fourth Session, adopted two decisions to amend the schedules of chemicals listed in the Convention (C-24/DEC.4 and C-24/DEC.5, both dated 27 November 2019). The changes entered into force for States Parties on 7 June 2020, following the timelines laid out in Article XV of the Convention.
59. The first declaration following the entry into force is the annual declaration on anticipated activities (ADAA) for 2021, which is due by 2 October 2020. The Secretariat stands ready to assist States Parties, through their National Authorities, with their ADAA preparations, as well as all aspects of the implementation of these changes.
60. The Secretariat has made steady progress with the ChemTech Centre project. Following completion of the design of the building, the Secretariat initiated the construction tender process in June.
61. The Secretariat intends to contact States Parties very soon, to obtain their ideas, specific needs, proposals, and suggestions in order to prepare a dossier of possible projects that can be carried out at the Centre as soon as the construction is completed. These projects would be implemented in the field of, inter alia, international cooperation and assistance, and could encompass activities such as scientific research programmes, lectures, and visits from academics.

62. Although the Secretariat remains committed to adhering as closely as possible to the target cost and timelines, adjustments may be necessary as the project progresses, including in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.
63. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 30.5 million have been received from 43 States Parties and the European Union, and through personal contributions. I sincerely thank all contributors for their generous support.
64. An additional EUR 3.0 million is needed to fully fund the project, without which the ChemTech Centre project will have to be adjusted. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has made significant efforts with States Parties to obtain the required funds.
65. Additionally, I have sent more than 100 personalised letters in different languages to presidents, chairpersons, directors, and chief executive officers of private companies, chemical industry associations, scientific societies, and foundations around the world to seek their financial support.
66. Yet, more time is needed to secure the necessary resources. I renew my appeal to all States Parties from all geographical regions to pledge financial support for this project, with amounts that suit their situation.
67. A video that provides a 3-D virtual reality tour of the ChemTech Centre has been made available to States Parties online.
68. States Parties can obtain further information on the status of the project in a Note issued by the Secretariat in advance of this session of the Council (S/1881/2020, dated 30 June 2020).
69. The donor wall to recognise all current and future contributors is now on display in the Delegates' Lounge and will be relocated to the ChemTech Centre upon completion of the project.
70. The International Cooperation and Assistance Division has initiated the necessary work to adapt its programmes to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. I wish to underline that this has been done within the limited technological and financial resources at our disposal.
71. Several courses have been redesigned, and new ones will follow, for online delivery. The Division is looking into ways to develop online training courses, interactive courses, e-learning modules, collaborative learning, and virtual courses, with the support of the Information Services Branch.
72. These online activities will not replace existing programmes. They will supplement them and allow the Secretariat to continue delivering its assistance and expertise to States Parties in line with its mandate. The Secretariat will keep States Parties informed of developments in due course.
73. On 3 July, I presented the Draft Programme and Budget for 2021 to States Parties. The draft Budget seeks to strike a balance between the constraints of the current global situation and the steady loss of purchasing power of the OPCW Budget.

74. The Secretariat is proposing to use a portion of the 2018 cash surplus that resulted from late receipt of some assessed contributions from States Parties that could not be used in time. This portion of the cash surplus would fund activities in 2021 to bridge the widening gap between assessed contributions and the costs of programmatic delivery.
75. However, this situation is not sustainable. Ultimately, if such constraints remain, States Parties will have to choose between programmatic priorities in order to adapt the focus of the Programme and Budget to the reality.
76. All programmatic activities should be supported by the Secretariat's IT capabilities and protected by its cybersecurity defences. The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the importance of modern and resilient information technology, tools, and systems to effectively respond to new challenges.
77. The Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021 incorporates elements on cybersecurity for States Parties to consider. As I have repeatedly highlighted to the Council, the Secretariat is facing an unprecedented number of increasingly sophisticated and targeted cyberattacks. Measures must be put in place to mitigate the current unacceptable risk of loss of confidentiality and integrity of information.
78. The Secretariat's persistent lack of funding to strategically invest in modern information and communications technology infrastructure, software, security controls, and personnel has resulted in a significant security deficit.
79. I thank States Parties for their voluntary contributions to the trust fund that has been established for improvements in cybersecurity. However, the growing number of hostile and potentially detrimental threats we are facing cannot be addressed with these resources alone. Elements of the Programme and Budget for 2021 aim to mitigate the Organisation's targeted cyberattacks and gradually bring our cyberdefence capabilities in line with international best practices.
80. As at 30 June 2020, the collection level for 2020 assessed contributions was 62.35%, compared to 53.74% on the same date last year.
81. Notably, cash inflows are considerably lower than forecast and, should this situation continue, the Working Capital Fund may have to be utilised within this quarter to maintain operational liquidity. I urge States Parties that have not yet paid their outstanding contributions to do so, at the earliest, and in full.
82. The Forty-Eighth Session of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF) was held remotely from 2 to 5 June.
83. The ABAF considered a number of issues, including the Organisation's financial position, the report of the Office of Internal Oversight, and the External Auditor's report.
84. The Secretariat's response to the ABAF's report (ABAF-48/1, dated 5 June 2020) has been made available to States Parties in advance of this session of the Council (EC-94/DG.22, dated 6 July 2020).

85. Tenure policy is an important aspect of the OPCW's organisational governance.
86. We have already extended assistance to the new co-facilitators, Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia and Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay, in their endeavour. They will explore ways of introducing more flexibility in the current system, so that the Secretariat can make the best use of available talent, experience, and expertise, while preserving the non-career nature of the Organisation.
87. I wish to recall that, compared to other organisations with a non-career nature, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, the OPCW has the most stringent regime of all. This puts us at a disadvantage in, inter alia, our efforts to attract and retain the most competent individuals in the field of disarmament. It is especially true as we continue to face the use of sophisticated tools and techniques provided by science and technology.
88. With regard to direct cooperation between States Parties and the Secretariat, a bilateral agreement on privileges and immunities between Ecuador and the OPCW entered into force on 12 May 2020.
89. Experience has demonstrated the operational value of these agreements. I invite States Parties that have not yet concluded or ratified an agreement on privileges and immunities to do so at the earliest opportunity.
90. This intersessional period has brought unique challenges for the OPCW. The Secretariat has not ceased to deliver for States Parties, despite the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, the Secretariat has continued to issue reports to the Council for its consideration. We look forward to hearing States Parties' views on these reports.
91. At the same time, it is imperative to look beyond the immediate impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and analyse the broader environment in which we operate. It is apparent that this environment has become more polarised, and more complex, since the OPCW started its operations 23 years ago.
92. That applies to all global disarmament efforts, as well as to the overall security situation in the world. It is worrisome to witness both the shape and current state of play related to the legal framework in the global arms control and disarmament area.
93. The time has come to reflect on how best to adapt our Organisation to this security context, as the moment of destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles is well within our reach. It is essential to ensure that the Secretariat continues to deliver useful services to all of you, Member States, in achieving the Convention's goals. You can count on the Secretariat's unwavering commitment to assisting you in this process.