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**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TO THE NINETY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(FULL VERSION)**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Ninety-Fifth Session of the Executive Council.
2. At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez for his continuing able leadership and guidance of the Council.
3. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has maintained the delivery pace of programmatic activities in all areas, in line with its obligations.
4. The Secretariat resumed Article VI inspections in mid-September, in accordance with the plan presented to the States Parties last July. This plan prioritises inspections according to the Convention, while taking into account national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 and to safeguard the health and safety of the inspectors.
5. Old chemical weapons inspections were also conducted during the intersessional period at sites in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in Italy.
6. The Secretariat has provided virtual international cooperation and assistance events in all areas, including national implementation, emergency preparedness and response, and the peaceful uses of chemistry.
7. As at 2 October, 22 online capacity-building and international cooperation events had been delivered, benefitting a total of 657 participants. States Parties were informed about the OPCW's operational posture and of the Secretariat's activities through a Note issued on 26 August. This Note updates the information provided through Notes published on 17 April, 20 May, and 3 June.
8. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has continued to develop its technical capabilities and to adapt programmatic delivery to evolving conditions and new modalities.



9. The twentieth edition of the induction workshop for diplomats involved in the work of the Organisation was held virtually on 17 September. Sixteen ambassadors and 91 delegates participated in the event and received a day of briefings from senior managers on all areas of the Secretariat's work.
10. In keeping with usual practice, the Programme and Budget has been a major area of focus in the post-summer intersessional period. States Parties are in receipt of the draft with budgetary proposals to finance our activities in 2021. During the informal consultations, the Secretariat has provided further details and information to States Parties when requested. I would like to thank the co-facilitators, Mr Marcin Kawałowski from the Permanent Representation of Poland and Mr Matteo Fachinotti from the Permanent Representation of Switzerland, for their dedicated efforts.
11. The Draft Programme and Budget for 2021 amounts to EUR 71.74 million. It is calibrated to provide the necessary resources to implement the Secretariat's operational and support programmes. The draft budget seeks to strike a balance between the financial pressures driven by the current global situation, and the steady loss of purchasing power of the OPCW budget.
12. The proposed budget includes an increase of EUR 780,000 compared to the 2020 budget. At the same time, States Parties' assessed contributions will remain unchanged. The Secretariat is proposing to reallocate a portion of travel- and conference-related costs from the core regular budget to extra-ordinary provisions, as a result of the uncertain impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on programmatic activities in 2021. These provisions are intended to be financed through a proposed "COVID-19 Variability Impact Fund", which would be funded by a portion of the 2018 cash surplus. This approach would help bridge the widening gap between assessed contributions and the costs of programmatic delivery.
13. However, and as noted by the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial matters in its latest report, the practice of budgeting at zero nominal growth for States Parties' assessed contributions is not sustainable with the current programmatic portfolio, as staff and operational costs continue to increase from year to year. As a result, States Parties will inevitably have to choose between increased assessed contributions and reduced programmatic activities.
14. Meanwhile, I am pleased to note that States Parties have supported two strategic financing initiatives. Firstly, the establishment of a Major Capital Investment Fund, which will help plan for and fund long-term capital replacements that are becoming necessary and which require attention.
15. Secondly, the transition to a biennial Programme and Budget cycle for 2022 and 2023 will increase organisational efficiency and support longer-term planning. In the same vein, States Parties need to ensure that the Working Capital Fund remains strong to allow for liquidity, should receipt of assessed contributions lag.
16. That said, efficient governance cannot be limited to securing necessary financing. Human resources are another key factor. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay and Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia for facilitating States Parties' discussions on a set of important governance issues, and for the time and interest they are devoting to this important task.

17. I have reported to States Parties on tangible improvements on a number of them, notably on gender balance and knowledge management. I remain committed to making steady progress in these areas. I am encouraged by the constructive engagement from delegations during the recent facilitation round.
18. With regard to the tenure policy, I note again that a more flexible arrangement, comparable to our sister disarmament organisations in Vienna, would be practical for the implementation of the Secretariat's tasks. I will therefore follow with interest further facilitation rounds.
19. Lastly, cybersecurity is an area in which strategic planning and investment are needed. The Organisation has experienced increasingly targeted and sophisticated reconnaissance and cyberattacks since the last session of the Council. Investment is needed in detection tools, as well as in the underlying security-related infrastructure. Moreover, as I have repeatedly highlighted to the Council, a cybersecurity programme, including modern and capable cyberdefence tools, dedicated staff, and sustainable funding, is crucial in order to effectively defend the Organisation's systems.
20. Last week, States Parties received a presentation and several reports on activities related to the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical dossier.
21. On 8 April 2020, the Secretariat released the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) (S/1867/2020, dated 8 April 2020). In response to the report, the Council adopted at its last session, in July, the decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic" (EC-94/DEC.2, dated 9 July 2020).
22. Paragraph 5 of the decision requests the Syrian Arab Republic to complete specific measures, pursuant to paragraph 36 of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, within 90 days. That is by 7 October: tomorrow, Wednesday, at midnight. Up to this moment, the Secretariat has not yet received any submission from the Syrian Arab Republic. I will keep States Parties updated on that matter. Consequently, the Secretariat is still not in a position to consider that the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration is accurate and complete.
23. Pursuant to paragraph 6 of the decision, I will report within 100 days—that is, by 17 October—on whether the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all of the measures requested in paragraph 5 of the decision. At the same time, the IIT continues its investigations into other incidents and will issue further reports in due course.
24. Last week, the Secretariat released two reports of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo on 24 November 2018 and in Saraqib on 1 August 2016 (S/1902/2020 and S/1901/2020, both dated 1 October 2020). The reports concluded that it was not possible for the FFM to establish whether or not chemicals were used as a weapon in those incidents.
25. I hereby reiterate how important it is for the Secretariat to receive from States Parties all available information pertaining to allegations of use of chemical weapons. This is crucial for the FFM to progress in its investigations.

26. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has continued its work to clarify gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies arising from Syria's initial declaration of chemical weapons and subsequent submissions.
27. In a letter dated 25 August 2020, the Syrian National Authority provided information concerning eight of 22 outstanding issues, including two amendments to its initial declaration.
28. The DAT deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic from 22 September to 3 October for the twenty-third round of consultations. The outstanding issues were addressed, as well as the information provided by the Syrian National Authority on 25 August. The Syrian National Authority is still expected to provide the further documentation requested, which remains necessary in order to resolve all outstanding issues.
29. The DAT also collected new samples to replace those collected in October 2019 that deteriorated before their analysis by designated laboratories, as reported to the Council at its previous session. The new samples are already at the OPCW Laboratory for further processing.
30. A report on the work of the DAT during the reporting period has been made available to the Council (EC-95/HP/2, dated 1 October 2020). The Secretariat will release an addendum to this report following the analysis of the information collected.
31. Turning to destruction, as at 1 October 2020, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by possessor States Parties of 71,092 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.32%, of all declared chemical weapons.
32. As at the same date, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of America of 26,558 MT, or 95.64%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remaining 4.36% of its stockpile by no later than 2023.
33. The verification of destruction activities at chemical weapons destruction facilities has continued under modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.
34. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons (ACWs) at various sites in China. The thirty-second trilateral meeting between China, Japan, and the Secretariat was held on 23 September 2020 in virtual mode. Destruction operations and related activities such as excavations and recoveries remain suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
35. As at 1 October 2020, approximately 83,700 items of ACWs had been declared as recovered, of which 57,701 ACWs had been destroyed.
36. With regard to international cooperation and assistance, the Secretariat convened four regional online meetings of National Authorities for States Parties in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean in the intersessional period. These events provided an opportunity to discuss regional priorities and the status of implementation of the Convention.

37. The Secretariat launched new virtual training programmes for first responders, as well as a tool to assist States Parties with the design and development of national protection programmes.
38. On 19 August, the Secretariat and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland signed a memorandum of understanding for a project to enhance the capabilities of laboratories from African States Parties and States Parties from Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC). The project focuses on capacity building in seven analytical laboratories in the Africa and GRULAC regions, with the aim of enabling them to join the OPCW designated laboratory network. I sincerely thank the United Kingdom for its interest and generosity.
39. Steady progress has been made in the project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre. The tender process for the main construction contract is under way and the Secretariat expects to award the contract early next year.
40. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 32.2 million have been received from 45 countries, the European Union, and three other donors. The members of the Global Partnership Initiative have also been consistently supporting the project with necessary funds, in particular under Canada's strong leadership, and with Canada's new contribution of EUR 1.6 million announced on 24 September, for which I am very grateful.
41. I sincerely thank all contributors for their generous support, thanks to which the Organisation will soon have at its disposal a fantastic tool that will allow us to expand the activities related to international cooperation. I also wish to recognise the effort and interest demonstrated by the members of the team in charge of the project. Thanks to them, the project is progressing, respecting the budget and the timelines.
42. A further EUR 1.3 million is needed by the end of 2020 to fully fund the project, without which the ChemTech Centre project will have to be adjusted. 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.
43. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism met virtually on 2 October under its new Chairperson, Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa. The meeting focused on the importance of the OPCW's partnerships in countering chemical terrorism and featured a presentation from the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). The UNOCT has become an important link between the OPCW's work and the broader United Nations system through the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. Given its increasing focus on capacity building, there is potential for greater synergies to be realised.
44. Looking at the coming months, the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is scheduled to be held from 30 November to 4 December 2020.

45. Bearing in mind the evolving situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place by the Host Country, the Secretariat has conducted a thorough analysis. Considerations with respect to health, safety, technical, logistical, and financial aspects brought the Secretariat to the conclusion that holding the session at the World Forum premises remains the most viable option.
46. The Secretariat has been in an active dialogue with the management of the World Forum to identify possible solutions to numerous challenges while pursuing the following key principles:
 - (a) ensuring that the session is held in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Convention; and
 - (b) providing the highest possible standards of health and safety for all delegates and Secretariat staff members.
47. On 1 October, the Secretariat briefed the General Committee about the basic arrangements for the forthcoming session of the Conference:
 - (a) the capacity of the conference rooms will be reduced so as to secure physical distancing of 1.5 metres;
 - (b) States Parties, intergovernmental organisations, and representatives of the global chemical industry and scientific community will be invited to limit their in-person presence at the session to one representative per delegation;
 - (c) the possibility to arrange for one additional seat per delegation is being explored; and
 - (d) the Secretariat is working on technical solutions to provide delegates with online (one-way) access to the proceedings of the sessions in all six OPCW official languages.
48. The participation of representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is to be online only, without setting any precedent for future sessions of the Conference. The accredited NGOs will be able to follow the session remotely and will have the opportunity to address the plenary sitting of the session by means of pre-recorded videos. The detailed guidelines for the delegates to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference are being finalised and will be circulated to the States Parties in due course.
49. For over 23 years, the OPCW has been effectively verifying the destruction of declared chemical weapons. As a result of this success, we are approaching the end of the destruction of all declared stockpiles. However, our mission is far from complete. It has become infinitely more complex and challenging.
50. A recent demonstration of this situation is the alleged poisoning on 20 August of a citizen of the Russian Federation, Mr Alexei Navalny, with a nerve agent. On 3 September, I received a letter from the State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, H.E. Mr Miguel Berger, stating that German experts had found that a nerve agent from the so-called “Novichok group” could be determined as the source of this poisoning. On this basis, the Technical Secretariat adopted specific preparatory measures to be ready to respond to any request from Germany.

51. Throughout this process, the Technical Secretariat has remained in continuous contact with the German authorities and with other States Parties.
52. Subsequently, the Secretariat received from Germany a request for technical assistance under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention. A team of experts from the Secretariat independently collected biomedical samples from Mr Navalny for analysis by OPCW designated laboratories. Upon receipt of the analysis results, the Secretariat's report was shared with the German authorities. Relevant information will be shared by Germany in due course.
53. On 1 October, I received a letter from H.E. Ambassador Alexander Shulgin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OPCW, asking that I consider sending a team of experts to the Russian Federation. I responded the next day, confirming the Secretariat's readiness to assist the Russian Federation and requesting the necessary clarifications from the Russian Federation in order to compose the team of experts to respond to this request.
54. I welcome this engagement of the States Parties directly concerned by this issue. These requests demonstrate the trust that States Parties have in the professionalism of the Secretariat in dealing with allegations of use of chemical weapons, through provision of independent technical expertise.
55. In closing, I reiterate that such an abhorrent incident is a matter of grave concern. Under the Chemical Weapons Convention, any poisoning of an individual through the use of a nerve agent is considered a use of chemical weapons.
56. I trust States Parties will consider actions they deem necessary to uphold the total ban against the use of chemical weapons.
57. The mission of the OPCW is as much enduring as it is challenging. You can count on my personal commitment and that of my staff in the shared endeavour of freeing the world of chemical weapons. We owe it to the victims, whom we always keep in our thoughts while delivering on the mandate that has been given to us.

Chemical demilitarisation and verification

Status of destruction of declared stockpiles

United States of America

58. The United States of America has two remaining chemical destruction facility sites: the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (PCAPP) in Colorado, and the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) in Kentucky.
59. The Secretariat has maintained its verification activities at these destruction facilities (in accordance with Notes EC-94/S/1, EC-94/S/2, EC-94/S/3, and EC-94/S/4, all dated 6 April 2020). Cooperation between the United States of America and the Secretariat has ensured uninterrupted verification of these activities during the intersessional period under modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.

60. On 5 September, the PCAPP completed the destruction of 298,763 155-mm projectiles filled with mustard. The PCAPP main plant began a planned period of inactivity on 11 September. Three static detonation chambers (SDCs) will be installed in October in order to expedite the destruction operations at this facility. The Secretariat will conduct the final engineering review of these SDCs during the week beginning 19 October.
61. Regarding the Blue Grass site, the destruction operations at the SDC are ongoing, while the main plant will continue its planned period of inactivity until the end of this year.

Abandoned chemical weapons

62. Although destruction operations and related activities have been suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak, China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons at various sites in China.

Declarations

63. Since the last session of the Council, there have been no changes with regard to the submission of initial declarations, with only one State Party, Tonga, yet to submit declarations under Articles III and VI of the Convention.
64. A presentation will be provided during this session of the Council on amendments and correspondence received by the Secretariat during the intersessional period regarding Article III declarations.
65. I take this opportunity to remind States Parties that the deadlines for the submission of annual declarations on anticipated activities for 2021 was 2 October for Schedule 1 facilities, and 1 November for Schedule 2 and 3 plant sites. I encourage States Parties to continue to provide timely and accurate declarations to the Secretariat.

Article VI inspections

66. The Secretariat continues to give priority to inspections of Schedule 1 facilities, as well as initial inspections of Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 plant sites, taking into account the conditions and restrictions in States Parties, and the health and safety of inspectors. Inspections of other chemical production facility plant sites and subsequent inspections are also being carried out to maximise resources and opportunities.
67. As previously reported, it will not be possible to complete all 241 Article VI inspections in 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. Those inspections that are not conducted before the end of this year will be prioritised in 2021.

Inspector training

68. During the intersessional period, inspectors continued to receive training through the growing OPCW online training catalogue. The Secretariat is continuing to explore opportunities to create additional online versions of classroom training courses when in-person training cannot be conducted.

69. From 13 to 15 July, an investigation of alleged use training course was delivered online by OPCW instructors. The training included 183 inspector/trainee days and 42 instructor days, with a total of 61 participants.
70. On 24 August, the group of six new inspectors (Group S) began their initial inspector training. Due to quarantine restrictions, the first two weeks of the training programme were conducted via virtual meetings and real-time online lectures. Since 31 August, the training activities have been conducted in-person at OPCW Headquarters and at external training locations.
71. In mid-September, training-related travel resumed, taking into account national measures in place to combat the spread of COVID-19, as well as the health and safety of inspectors. This new development allowed for some of the training activities scheduled for 2020 to be completed or to be planned in more detail.
72. From 21 to 25 September, one Health and Safety Specialist from the Inspectorate took part in an offshore medics course at Nottingham University in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
73. This week, two Health and Safety Specialists from the Inspectorate will attend a tactical combat casualty care course in the Czech Republic.
74. I would like to take this opportunity to express the Secretariat's appreciation to the Czech Republic, Italy, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for hosting training courses in 2020. I would also like to thank Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Serbia for making forthcoming training possible under the current COVID-19 measures adopted by the Secretariat of the OPCW.

OPCW Laboratory

75. The Forty-Seventh OPCW Proficiency Test and the Fifth OPCW Biomedical Proficiency Test have been completed and the results have been shared with States Parties (S/1892/2020, dated 2 September 2020 and S/1903/2020, dated 2 October 2020).
76. The network of designated laboratories consists of 27 laboratories from 19 States Parties. Twenty-one laboratories from 18 States Parties are designated for environmental sample analysis, and 18 laboratories from 13 States Parties are designated for biomedical sample analysis. Currently, 14 of the 27 laboratories have concluded technical arrangements with the Secretariat. Such arrangements are necessary to allow the undertaking of off-site analysis of samples. I therefore encourage States Parties to assist their laboratories in completing such agreements.
77. The 50th Validation Group (VG) meeting was held remotely on 16 September with 18 participants. The VG approved 120 new data sets, which will be provided to the Council at its Ninety-Sixth Session for consideration and possible inclusion in the OPCW Central Analytical Database for 2021 (OCAD 2021).

International cooperation and assistance

78. The Secretariat continues to offer and further improve on remote capacity-building events, while maintaining readiness to restart in-person events when and where conditions permit. The Secretariat will build on successful recent events with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of its international cooperation and assistance programmes.

Implementation support

79. The Secretariat held the Nineteenth Regional Meeting of National Authorities for States Parties in Eastern Europe online on 28 July. The interactive session provided an opportunity for 10 participants from 10 States Parties to discuss the latest developments concerning the implementation of the Convention, with a focus on Articles VI, VII, and XI.
80. The Eighteenth Regional Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties from the Asia and the Pacific region was held online on 29 July. The three-hour virtual session provided an opportunity for 38 participants from 25 States Parties to discuss the latest developments concerning the implementation of the Convention, specifically, of Articles VI, VII, X, and XI.
81. The Twenty-First Regional Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties from the GRULAC region was held online on 30 July. Fifty representatives from 24 States Parties participated in the meeting, which focused on regional priorities, the Secretariat's integrated approach to capacity building, issues relating to Articles VI and VII of the Convention, and the Electronic Declaration Information System (EDIS).
82. The Eighteenth Regional Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties from the Africa region was held online on 4 August. The event was attended by 32 participants from 21 States Parties. The meeting was an opportunity to inform participants on the implementation of the OPCW Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention—commonly known as “the Africa Programme”—the status of implementation of Article VII in the African region, and the implications of the changes to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention.
83. From 25 August to 25 September, over 100 customs officers from 37 Member States participated in an online training course on the enforcement of the transfers regime for scheduled chemicals under the Convention. The course was organised in cooperation with the World Customs Organization and aimed to enhance customs officers' knowledge of the relevant provisions of the Convention, tools to identify toxic chemicals, and approaches to handling suspicious chemical cargoes.
84. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat issued the annual reports on the status of implementation of Article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention (EC-95/DG.8 C-25/DG.6 dated 4 September 2020 and Corr.1, dated 2 October 2020; EC-95/DG.9 C-25/DG.7, dated 4 September 2020 and Corr.1, dated 2 October 2020; and EC-95/DG.10 C-25/DG.8, dated 4 September 2020 and Corr.1, dated 2 October 2020). The reports are based on responses to the Secretariat's note verbale sent on 28 February 2020, requesting updates on States Parties' status of implementation of Article VII. The Secretariat received responses from 103 States

Parties. As at 31 July, 158 States Parties had adopted national implementing legislation, of which 119 have legislation covering all initial measures and 39 have legislation covering some initial measures. Thirty-five States Parties have yet to report on the adoption of legislation.

85. The Secretariat organised a general training course on the Convention for National Authorities' personnel and stakeholders in French-speaking States Parties from 7 to 9 September. A one week in-person course was transformed into a three-day training programme comprised of pre-recorded presentations, live interactive sessions, and a live interactive exercise. Twenty participants from 12 States Parties attended the course.

Assistance and protection

86. An online meeting for partner training centres for assistance and protection in the Asia and the Pacific region was conducted on 15 and 16 July. The meeting provided an opportunity to share information on how to sustain and enhance this cooperation in light of COVID-19 restrictions.
87. Participants agreed to a plan of action to establish an online regional assistance and protection basic training course, and to ensure that face-to-face training restarts promptly when conditions permit. Twenty-two participants representing partner training centres and National Authorities of Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Sri Lanka took part in the meeting.
88. On 6 and 7 October, an inaugural online basic training course on the use of the Wireless Information System for Emergency Responders (WISER) and the Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG) for first responders in the East Africa Community (EAC) is being conducted. The online basic training on WISER/ERG is an integral part of the capacity-building programme in assistance and protection for the Member States of the EAC. The main focus of this training is to build capacity of the first responders to quickly and accurately characterise and contain incidents involving hazardous chemicals during the initial response phase. Additionally, the course aims to impart basic knowledge and skills on the use of the WISER and the ERG, including how these tools provide a wide range of information on hazardous substances. Over 30 participants from Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, the Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia are participating in the course. The Population Protection Institute of the Czech Republic is providing technical support and co-facilitation for the course.

International cooperation

89. On 4 and 5 August, the Secretariat held an online Expert group meeting on green and sustainable chemistry (GSC) for safety and security through innovation. The meeting provided an opportunity for the participants to share knowledge and views on the contribution of GSC to safer and more secure chemical products and processes. Eighteen experts from 13 States Parties participated in the meeting.

90. On 12 August, the Secretariat held an online training programme on chemical safety and security management for African Member States. The programme took a scenario-based approach to safety and security management. The event was attended by 42 participants from 12 States Parties, representing government agencies, academia, chemical industry, and defence organisations.
91. On 19 August, the Secretariat hosted the online Executive Programme on Integrated Chemicals Management and Seminar on the Chemical Weapons Convention and Chemical Safety and Security Management for Member States of the OPCW in the Africa Region. The event was attended by 34 participants representing government agencies, academia, and the chemical industry. It aimed to strengthen synergies and provide a platform for stakeholders to cross learn and share best practices in chemical safety and security management.
92. From 7 to 11 September, the Secretariat hosted two parallel online training courses to enhance laboratory capabilities, in collaboration with the Finnish Institute for Verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (VERIFIN). The courses focused on chemical analysis exercises relevant to the Convention, particularly the use of liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry and laboratory quality management. Seven participants from Bangladesh, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania attended the online training sessions.
93. From 7 to 30 September, an online course entitled “Wuppertal Online Course – Explosion Protection and Error Management 2020” was offered to 24 selected participants from the Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and GRULAC regions. The course included material newly developed by the University of Wuppertal and was funded by a voluntary contribution from Germany.
94. From 21 September to 2 October, an intersessional online training programme was provided for participants in the Associate Programme. The training offered 26 participants from 26 States Parties newly developed remote learning materials based on key components of the Convention.
95. Currently, there are 21 ongoing research projects that are funded under the Programme for Support of Research Projects. An “Invitation to Apply for Research Projects in Areas Relevant to the Chemical Weapons Convention” (S/1895/2020, dated 10 September 2020) has been reissued by the Secretariat to encourage new applications.
96. During the reporting period, five fellowships were successfully completed under the Fellowship Programme. Fellows from Algeria (2), Cameroon (2), and Serbia conducted and completed research in Belgium, Brazil, Finland (2), and Switzerland.

Africa Programme

97. During the intersessional period, diverse online training opportunities were offered under the fifth phase of the Africa Programme. The detailed list of these activities is included in the annual report on the Programme which was made available to States Parties in advance of this session of the Council (EC-95/DG.11 C-25/DG.9, dated 10 September 2020).

98. The Secretariat conducted the first impact assessment of the Africa Programme since its inception to gauge its impact at the outcome level. The results confirmed the effectiveness of the Programme and its value in terms of addressing the needs and priorities of African States Parties in relation to the Convention.
99. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate my encouragement to States Parties to financially support the special projects for extra-budgetary funding under the Africa Programme, announced by the Secretariat on 1 July.

Education and outreach

100. I am pleased to announce that a temporary working group (TWG) of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) on e-learning has been established to engage with a wider audience and raise awareness about the OPCW's mandate and achievements. Enhancing the OPCW's e-learning offering has become especially important due to the COVID-19 outbreak, as remote education has a critical role to play in reaching out to and communicating with our stakeholders. Professor Rocael Hernández Rizzardini, ABEO member from Galileo University in Guatemala, has been appointed as the TWG Chairperson. The TWG is comprised of 10 experts who are prominent academics with experience and knowledge of theory and practice in e-learning. In nominating the TWG members, due consideration was given to geographical diversity and gender balance. I wish to commend the ABEO Chairperson Dr Jo Husbands and Vice-Chairperson Dr Adriana Bernacchi for their dedicated work to launch this TWG.
101. I wish to thank the European Union for supporting the OPCW's e-learning efforts with necessary funding. I look forward to the outcomes of the work of the TWG on e-learning and wish the members success in their endeavour.

Scientific Advisory Board

102. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) met for the first time online for its Twenty-Ninth Session on 1 and 2 September. I appreciate the Board's efforts and focus during these uncertain times and its commitment to providing sound advice on matters related to the Convention. The report of the Twenty-Ninth Session of the SAB (SAB-29/1, dated 2 September 2020) and my response (EC-95/DG.26, dated 2 October 2020) have been made available to States Parties.

Administration

103. As at 30 September, the collection rate for the 2020 assessed annual contributions stood at 76.89%, which is similar to the level on the same date in 2019 (76.83%). In addition, there is still a shortfall of EUR 5.3 million in contributions in regard to the previous year's budget, and a further EUR 6.6 million in Article IV and V verification costs remain unreimbursed.
104. The 2019 Financial Statements were audited and certified by the External Auditor of the OPCW and received unqualified opinions. This confirms that the Financial Statements are compliant with International Public Sector Accounting Standards and reveal no material weaknesses.

Information technology

105. The Secretariat has increased the use of online meeting and collaboration platforms. An average of more than 100 online meetings are now held each day on the Microsoft Teams platform.
106. The Secretariat has embarked on a programme of work to improve technical solutions across the Secretariat. During the intersessional period, the OPCW embarked on a 12-month “Digital Resilience Strategic Plan” involving major improvements to the underlying tools and systems that enable the work of the Secretariat. This plan will involve upgrades of the intranet and productivity tools, along with enhancements to cybersecurity defences.
107. I am pleased to inform States Parties that the Secretariat is currently developing “Catalyst”, a new extranet platform. This foundational platform will allow users to more easily navigate, browse, and search OPCW documents. Catalyst will be launched and made available to users during the first quarter of 2021.

Human resources management

108. The Human Resources Branch is working to strengthen gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within the OPCW through mutually reinforcing efforts involving training and systemic analysis. A gender and diversity audit, which is due for completion by year end, will support the Secretariat’s efforts to develop a road map to further strengthen the Secretariat’s efforts in this area.

External relations

109. During the week of 7 September, I conducted an official visit to Madrid, Spain, during which I had an audience with His Majesty, King Felipe VI, and met with H.E. Ms Arancha González Laya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain.
110. During the intersessional period, the OPCW has welcomed to the OPCW 14 new Permanent Representatives who have presented their credentials, from Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Malta, Monaco, Norway, Oman, Panama, Peru, South Africa, the United States of America, and Viet Nam.

T.M.C. Asser Institute

111. The 11th edition of the T.M.C. Asser Institute’s training programme on disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was held virtually from 28 September to 2 October. Fifty early and mid-career professionals from 21 States Parties participated and increased their knowledge about the diplomatic, legal, and technical aspects of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Virtual outreach

112. The Secretariat will launch on 12 October a new series of short videos to broaden understanding of the Convention and the OPCW’s priorities and activities. These videos will be featured on the OPCW website and social media channels.

113. The OPCW will participate in the annual Hague International Open Day on 12 October. The new video series will be featured as part of its virtual offering which will enable participants to “visit” the OPCW and learn more about its work. The OPCW’s Human Resources Branch will also participate in a live webinar focused on job opportunities at international organisations in The Hague.
114. Core content of the OPCW website has now been published in all of the Organisation’s official languages. This is a significant development in ensuring that key information about the OPCW’s work is accessible to a broader audience.

Civil society

115. Seventy-six civil society organisations represented by 253 individuals have applied to attend the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. The number of applications demonstrates sustained interest from civil society in participation in the sessions of the Conference. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, NGO participants will be invited to submit video statements to the Conference.

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