



Remarks by the OPCW Director-General to the Briefing for non-Hague based Permanent Representations to the OPCW

As delivered on 18 November 2020, The Hague, Netherlands

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you to this annual briefing for Permanent Representations to the OPCW based in Brussels. I am pleased that many delegations have registered to take part in today's event.

The aim of this session is to highlight the OPCW's activities and to assist you with preparations for the 25th Session of the Conference of the States Parties. The Permanent Representations based in Brussels are a valued and fundamental part of the OPCW diplomatic community. This community is very active and it is essential.

It is even more essential that we are working together in a challenging time. The situation regarding the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime is worrying.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was signed in 2017, may not enter into force. The successful Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) was suspended in 2019. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) was signed in 1993; however it has not entered into force. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was terminated in 2002. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) opened for signature in 1996, has not entered into force and its founding principle may be under threat unless there is a change in position from some countries. The Treaty on Open Skies that entered into force in January 2002, and has brought important benefits during the last 18 years, will come to an end very soon, if something is not done on time. The Biological Weapons Convention entered into force in 1975. Progress has certainly been made by its 183 States Parties; however the challenges to its effective implementation remain clear. So clear, that the Convention was never granted an organisation in charge to implement it.

In this context, we realise with concern that the internationally recognised legal structure that underpins the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture is under threat. Against this backdrop, the Chemical Weapons Convention is considered one of the world's most successful disarmament treaties.

With 193 States Parties, the treaty covers 98% of the world's population. The Convention and the OPCW have delivered concrete and durable results in the global effort to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. Over 98% of 72,000 tonnes of declared chemical weapons in the world have been verified as eliminated. Safe and steady destruction continues and the remaining fraction is on track to be destroyed by the year 2023.

The Convention is a unique treaty as it embodies a total and verifiable ban. It is a goal much more ambitious than the one of non-proliferation, because we work for complete elimination, total destruction of chemical weapons, vigilance against re-emergence, zero tolerance.

In recognition of the OPCW's extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons, the Organisation received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

What has been achieved under the Convention in little over two decades amounts to a significant and tangible contribution to international disarmament. Much has been invested to attain this achievement and at present the international community and the Organisation have an obligation to protect it.

The success of the OPCW is the result of several generations of diplomatic work by OPCW Permanent Representations and in the capitals of the States Parties. Over 1.4 billion euro from State Party public funding has been dedicated to accomplish this achievement.

Today, we are nearing the end of the elimination of declared chemical weapons. As we near this milestone, our focus is shifting to the difficult challenge of preventing re-emergence and implementing the Convention in its full extent.

Across the world, thousands of tons of toxic chemicals are produced, transported, stored, traded, and consumed daily for entirely legitimate ends. Still, the risk exists that fractions of these dangerous substances, if diverted with ill intent, cause serious harm. Further, the rapid evolution in chemical substances, science, and technology enhances the potential risk of accidents, with consequences for people, infrastructure, and the environment.

As events in Iraq, Malaysia, Syria, and the United Kingdom have shown, chemical weapons are not only used by armies through bombs or rockets. Any toxic chemical, even in small quantities, used with the intent to harm or kill, is a chemical weapon under the Convention. This reality underscores that the OPCW's ongoing critical work must continue, despite the current challenging global conditions.

As you are aware, the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties will be held in The Hague from 30 November. The Conference has the obligation to meet annually to consider the implementation of the Convention, and ensure the smooth functioning of the OPCW.

This year, we are working to reduce the duration of the meeting to the shortest timeframe possible, taking into consideration the COVID-19 situation in The Hague, and the concerns expressed by the Dutch authorities. In doing so, the double goal is to reduce the health and safety risk for all participants, while fulfilling the Conference's obligation on behalf of peace and security, and in compliance with the Convention.

In this regard, and with due cognisance of the COVID-19 circumstances, we encourage all Permanent Representations to send representatives to The Hague to participate in this important Conference. I thank those delegations who have already submitted their registration, and encourage those who have not yet registered to do so at their earliest convenience.

We assure you that the Secretariat is working with due diligence on the technical, logistical, and financial aspects of the Conference while paying attention to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 outbreak. The General Committee is currently exploring an option to meet with

a reduced programme of work, addressing only the most vital items of the agenda, and resuming the session of the Conference as soon as the situation allows, for instance in Spring 2021. This programme of work would cover decisions related to the 2021 Programme and Budget, the reform of the financial regulations and rules related to the new biannual budget, the scale of assessments for 2021, and the date of submission of the financial statements in 2021. Please be assured that the programme and modality for the Conference will be communicated to States Parties as soon as the General Committee has completed its deliberations.

The 2021 Programme and Budget is vital for the functioning of the organisation. The draft budget for 2021 amounts to EUR 71.74 million, with no increase of assessed contributions compared to 2020. It is calibrated to provide the necessary resources to implement the Secretariat's operational and support functions. It 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. However, budgeting based on zero-nominal growth is not sustainable. The gap between assessed contributions and States Parties' programmatic needs is widening each year. Sustainable regular budget funding is needed to enable effective planning and efficient delivery.

During this unprecedented year, the Secretariat has remained focused on resolutely implementing its mandate and delivering for States Parties. In this regard, the Secretariat has developed its technical capabilities to adapt programmatic delivery to evolving conditions and new modalities.

The International Cooperation and Assistance Division has delivered 38 online capacity building events this year, benefitting some 1,400 participants. The Secretariat will use the lessons learned from these events to supplement, complement, and enhance our training capacity in the future. Ms Kayoko Gotoh, Director of the International Cooperation and Assistance Division, will provide a comprehensive update this morning on her Division's activities.

The Africa Programme is an important element of our capacity building efforts. For 13 years, the Africa Programme has been delivering tailored assistance to African States Parties. The fifth phase of the Africa Programme was launched on 1 January this year. This new phase builds on the achievements of the Programme in order to further improve the OPCW's cooperation with African States Parties on the implementation of the Convention. It has been designed to enhance programme effectiveness and improve monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment. Mr Dawsar Drissi, from the International Cooperation and Assistance Division, will brief you in detail on the latest progress in this important Programme.

In order to deliver all our programmes, the Secretariat must guarantee expertise across a broad range of areas to ensure the services we provide to States Parties are of the highest quality. This translates into transfer of information and training for inspectors, scientists, technologists, safety and security experts, first responders, medical professionals, legal experts, customs agents, national authorities, etc.

The OPCW's project to upgrade our current OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to become a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, will play an important role in this regard. It will create new capacity-building and joint research opportunities and will provide a platform for international cooperation. It will enhance our knowledge management capabilities. The new

laboratory will equip the Organisation with the tools and resources needed to adapt to new developments in science and technology.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak, the project has continued to make steady progress within the planned timeline. The final design of the ChemTech Centre has been completed and the construction tender process is underway. Construction of the facility is scheduled to begin in the summer next year.

The Secretariat will work with States Parties to prepare a dossier of potential 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 international cooperation and assistance, and could encompass activities such as scientific research programmes, lectures, and visits from academics.

To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling 33.3 million EUR have been received from 45 countries, the European Union, and personal contributors. I sincerely thank all contributors for their generous support.

An additional 200.000 EUR is needed to fully fund the project. I encourage all States Parties from all regions to pledge financial support for this project, with amounts that suit their situation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year, the OPCW entered its seventh year of engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic. The OPCW has invested a great deal of time, attention, and resources in our efforts to deliver on the mandates given to us by States Parties regarding the Syrian chemical weapons dossier.

The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues to address with Syria the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies found in the initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme. The latest round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian government took place in Damascus from 22 September to 3 October.

It remains the responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic to submit a declaration that can be considered as accurate and complete, and to fully comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, OPCW decisions, and UN Security Council resolutions. For its part, the Secretariat remains fully committed to assisting the Syrian Arab Republic in meeting its obligations.

The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) continues to establish facts surrounding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals for hostile purposes in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 2 October, the Secretariat released two reports of the FFM regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo on 24 November 2018 and in Saraqib on 1 August 2016. 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. To date, the FFM has investigated 77 allegations of chemical weapons use and determined 18 events of likely or confirmed use in Syria.

In June 2018, the Conference of the States Parties adopted a decision entitled “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use”. In line with this decision, the Secretariat established the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to investigate incidents of alleged use in the Syrian

Arab Republic. On 8 April 2020, the Secretariat released the first report of the IIT concerning three of the nine cases the IIT has decided to investigate. 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.

Following the issuance of the report, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision last July entitled “Addressing the possession and the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”. Pursuant to this decision, the Syrian Arab Republic was requested to declare within 90 days to the Secretariat the facilities where the chemical weapons used in the 24, 25, and 30 March 2017 attacks were developed, produced, stockpiled, and operationally stored for delivery.

Under that decision, Syria is also requested to declare to the Secretariat all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses, as well as chemical weapons production facilities and other related facilities. Further, the Syrian Arab Republic is expected to resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile and programme. Finally, this decision requires the Director-General to report to the OPCW Executive Council and to all States Parties, within 100 days of this decision, on whether the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all of the measures I just described.

The 90 day deadline given to Syria expired on 7 October. I reported that Syria has not completed any of the measures I just described. At the same time, it should be recalled that the OPCW is not a court of justice, and the role of the Secretariat is neither that of a prosecutor or of a judge.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The post-destruction era will present new and difficult challenges. To succeed, we will need to harness the talents of the best and the brightest from all States Parties.

This means reaching as many as possible highly qualified potential candidates from around the world and encouraging them to direct their talents towards the OPCW’s noble goal. In this regard, recruiting on the widest geographical basis is a priority for the Organisation, as well as a requirement of the Convention.

Our senior management structure has both equal geographic representation and also gender balance. I urge all States Parties to promote employment at the Secretariat to highly qualified candidates and encourage them to apply for suitable positions.

Your support and commitment is essential for the Organisation to fulfil its crucial mandate to rid the world of chemical weapons. We owe it to the victims of chemical weapons and to future generations.

The Secretariat greatly appreciates your participation in this briefing and your ongoing support for the OPCW.

Thank you for your attention.
