



**OPCW**

**Conference of the States Parties**

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**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES  
AT ITS TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION**

Excellency, Mr Ambassador,  
Dear friend,

1. We begin today a Conference session overcoming many challenges, which are now well known. Once again, in 2020, we continue to meet our obligations thanks to the collaboration and the goodwill of all.
2. There is no precedent for the format of the Conference session that we are about to hold, and for that reason, there is a need for special attention and to work outside the norm.
3. I have known you for a long time and am aware of your extensive professional experience and your many qualities.
4. I have witnessed the efforts that you have made with the goal of being prepared to serve as Chairperson of this session, and I have no doubt that your election by the States Parties is a success, as you are going to brilliantly lead the development of this session of the Conference; I congratulate you on this appointment.

Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,

5. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.
6. I wish to thank the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Krassimir Kostov of Bulgaria, who efficiently steered the work of the Conference and the deliberations of the General Committee. Thank you very much, Ambassador Kostov, for the dedication, interest, and effort you have devoted for the benefit of the States Parties and the Organisation.
7. I am very grateful to Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador for his able guidance of the Executive Council as its Chairperson during a busy and challenging period. Ambassador Vásquez, thank you sincerely.



8. You know that you have all the appreciation of the people of this Organisation and on behalf of all of us I wish you the best in Turkey, a great country, where you will hold your new Ambassadorial position. Fortunately, I can say that we will see you soon again in The Hague, because your task as Chairperson of the Executive Council will require your presence at its next session.
9. Today, we meet here for this adapted session of the Conference of the States Parties. This is thanks to the goodwill and understanding of all of you, as well as to the work of the General Committee, chaired by Ambassador Kostov, and to the diligent preparatory efforts of the Secretariat staff.
10. The Conference has the obligation to meet annually to consider the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and to ensure the proper functioning of the Organisation. This year, it has been decided that the session of the Conference will be held in two parts, in the shortest time frame possible.
11. Together, we have taken into consideration the COVID-19 situation in The Hague, the guidance of the Dutch authorities, and our obligation to meet, established by international law through the Convention.
12. The goal is to reduce the health and safety risk for all participants, to the lowest possible level, while fulfilling the Conference's obligations. Therefore, the programme of work for this part of the session addresses only the most vital agenda items. The session of the Conference will be resumed, with its second part to be held as soon as the situation allows.
13. In this unusual year, more than ever, the Secretariat has remained determined to implement its mandate, and to continue to deliver for States Parties during this difficult period.
14. Verification at chemical weapons destruction facilities has continued, thanks to modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site. As at 30 November 2020, a total of 69,317 metric tonnes (MT) or 98.3% of declared Category 1 chemical weapons had been destroyed under verification by the Secretariat.
15. After the break imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic last March, in mid-September the Secretariat resumed chemical industry inspections under Article VI of the Convention. This was done in accordance with the plan presented to the States Parties in July.
16. Old chemical weapons inspections were also conducted this year at sites in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
17. Throughout the year, the Secretariat has defined new modalities to adapt to the new conditions for the delivery of our programmes. In this context, I am pleased to refer to the activity of the International Cooperation and Assistance Division, which has been able to deliver 38 online capacity-building events this year, benefiting some 1,400 participants. The Secretariat will use the lessons learned from these events to optimise our training capacity in the future.

18. We have also continued to make progress in all areas of the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. On 8 April, the Secretariat released the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) (EC-94/S/5, dated 8 April 2020). The report concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the identified perpetrators used chemical weapons in Ltamenah on three occasions in March 2017. Sarin was used on two occasions and chlorine was used on one occasion. Furthermore, the IIT identified individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force as the perpetrators.
19. In this context, let me recall that, while the Secretariat has had the authority, since 2018, to identify the perpetrators of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Secretariat is neither a public prosecutor, nor a court of justice. States Parties do have at their disposal tools to proceed further, on the basis of the information they have received.
20. Following the issuance of the IIT report, the Executive Council of the Organisation adopted a decision last July, requesting the Syrian Arab Republic to declare within 90 days to the Secretariat the chemical weapons used in March 2017 attacks in Ltamenah (EC-94/DEC.2, dated 9 July 2020). Under that decision, the Syrian Arab Republic was also requested to declare all the chemical weapons it currently possesses, and to resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration.
21. On 14 October, I reported to the Executive Council and to all States Parties that the Syrian Arab Republic had not completed any of the measures I have just mentioned. In the meantime, the IIT continues its investigations of other incidents, as you have been informed through the Note by the Secretariat S/1918/2020 (dated 27 November 2020).
22. The twenty-third round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Syrian Arab Republic took place in Damascus from 22 September to 3 October. In the course of this deployment, the DAT collected samples, verified the destruction of items previously observed as undestroyed, and discussed the current status of all outstanding issues.
23. The activities and outcomes of the DAT's deployment were reported to the Council on 18 November in two separate documents: firstly, by means of an Addendum to the report of the DAT of 1 October 2020, and secondly, through a Note by the Director-General. In these documents it was reported that, during the recent round of consultations, three issues related to the Syrian initial declaration had been closed, while 19 issues remained outstanding.
24. At this stage, considering the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete.
25. On 1 October, the Secretariat released two reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) (S/1901/2020 and S/1902/2020, both dated 1 October 2020), regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo in November 2018, and in Saraqib in August 2016. The reports concluded that it was not possible for the FFM to establish whether chemicals were used or likely used as a weapon in those incidents.

26. Currently, the FFM is continuing to analyse information collected from its most recent deployments.
27. On 20 August this year, a Russian citizen and political activist, Mr Alexei Navalny, fell seriously ill on a flight in the Russian Federation. Two days later, Mr Navalny was taken to Germany for medical treatment.
28. In September, the Secretariat conducted a technical assistance visit in response to a request from Germany under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention. During the visit, a team of experts from the Secretariat collected biomedical samples directly from Mr Navalny for analysis by OPCW designated laboratories. The results of the analysis confirmed that a toxic chemical of the Novichok family was found in Mr Navalny's blood.
29. According to the Convention, the poisoning of an individual through the use of any nerve agent is a use of a chemical weapon, whether or not this chemical is included in Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention.
30. Upon receipt of the analysis of the samples by the OPCW designated laboratories, the Secretariat prepared a report, which was shared with the German authorities. At the request of Germany, the Secretariat subsequently shared a summary of the report with all States Parties and made it public.
31. On 6 October, I received a request from the Russian Federation for a technical assistance visit under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention. The Secretariat and the Russian Federation are currently defining together all the legal, technical, operational, and logistical parameters in order for this visit to take place.
32. This year, the project to build a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, the ChemTech Centre, has made steady progress within the planned timeline and budget. The Centre will be an essential tool to fully address new and emerging chemical weapons threats, as well as to support international cooperation and assistance capacity-building activities.
33. In the coming 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 has been 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.
34. The final design of the ChemTech Centre has been completed and the construction tender process is under way. Construction of the facility is scheduled to begin next summer.
35. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 33.3 million have been received from 45 countries, the European Union, and individual contributors. The members of the Global Partnership, composed of 30 countries and the European Union, have provided a very relevant support to the project.
36. I thank you, all contributors, for your meaningful support.

37. Today, the agreed programme of work of the Conference covers issues that require immediate attention in order for the Secretariat to pursue its activities in 2021.
38. Specifically, I refer to four decisions, related to:
  - (a) the Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021;
  - (b) amendments to the OPCW Financial Regulations and Rules in relation to the new biennial Programme and Budget;
  - (c) the scale of assessments for 2021 established by the United Nations; and
  - (d) the date of submission of the Financial Statements of the OPCW in 2021.
39. After six months of due consideration and extensive discussions, the Executive Council decided in October to recommend that the Conference adopt the Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021.
40. The budget amounts to EUR 71.74 million, with no increase of assessed contributions compared to 2020.
41. The Draft Programme and 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 Organisation. In this context, it is necessary to emphasise, once again, that a budget based on zero nominal growth is not sustainable.
42. Staff and other core operational costs continue to increase year to year. The Organisation experienced increases in staff costs in 2019 and 2020, as mandated by the International Civil Service Commission. In addition, the Organisation continues to face increased year-to-year licencing costs in relation to our information technology equipment and programmes. Furthermore, inflation in the Netherlands is affecting items such as rent and utilities.
43. As the purchasing power of the Organisation has not been updated every year for a long period of time, there is increasingly less money available to finance activities, such as those in relation to international cooperation and assistance.
44. Meanwhile, the Secretariat continues the transition towards a biennial budget cycle, as decided by the Conference last year. Preparations continue for next year's submission of the first biennial Programme and Budget, for the period of 2022 and 2023.
45. The establishment of a Major Capital Investment Fund, as agreed by the Conference at its last session, will allow us to finance long-term capital replacements that are becoming necessary. In the same vein, States Parties need to ensure that the Working Capital Fund remains strong to allow for liquidity, should we not receive the assessed contributions on time. In this regard, the Organisation is currently facing a very weak cash position due to significant unpaid assessed contributions, as well as reimbursements due from some States Parties in relation to inspections already carried out.

46. Unless significant assessed contributions and reimbursements are received by 31 December 2020, the Organisation may face a cash deficit position. Should this occur, the Conference will need to decide on the means to address this situation. It is therefore imperative that States Parties pay their assessed contributions and reimbursements.
47. Despite the increase in demands on its resources, the Secretariat has continued to produce concrete and tangible results. During this unprecedented year, the Secretariat has continually adapted and delivered.
48. It is only fair to underline the extraordinary effort made by many staff members of the Secretariat and the interest and professional capacity they have demonstrated. I am proud to be able to communicate to you that, thanks to them, despite the difficulties, the Secretariat has continued to deliver throughout the year.
49. The Conference will mark the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare with a minute's silence to be held in this room tomorrow, Tuesday, 1 December, at 14:45. On this solemn occasion we honour their memory and acknowledge our duty to ensure that future generations will be spared such suffering.
50. The world now is not the same as the one of 1993, when the Convention was signed. It is a more polarised place, where progress in demilitarisation and non-proliferation is constantly threatened, and the efforts of the international community to live in a safer place are compromised.
51. In such an environment it is up to you, the 193 States Parties, to pursue every effort to protect the Convention. I can assure you that you can count on the commitment, independence, and expertise of all the Secretariat staff members, including the Director-General, to assist you in our shared endeavour.