



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Fifth Session
20 – 22 April 2021 (Part II)

C-25/DG.22
20 April 2021
Original: ENGLISH

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

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. I warmly welcome all of you to the second part of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. To save time and to be in line with the Dutch regulations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I will keep my presentation as brief as possible.
2. I wish to thank Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia of Mexico who so competently chaired the first part of our session last year. Thank you very much, Ambassador Zabalgoitia, for your ongoing dedication and excellent work.
3. I would also like to welcome once again Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador, who continued to guide the Executive Council so ably in the period between the two parts of the Conference.
4. Today, this session is able to resume safely in this adapted modality thanks to your commitment, general goodwill, and cooperation, reflected in your agreement to organise the work of the Conference in two parts. I also wish to convey my appreciation to the dedicated staff of the Secretariat for their diligent preparations.
5. The first part of this Conference accomplished a great deal. Among other things, the Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021 was adopted. The latest update on the OPCW's programmatic and operating posture throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was provided to States Parties through a Note issued on 18 February.
6. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight progress in some priority areas.
7. On the Centre for Chemistry and Technology—the ChemTech Centre—I am pleased to share with you some further important milestones. On 3 February this year, the irrevocable construction permit for the Centre was granted by the Municipality of Pijnacker-Nootdorp. The OPCW now has full approval by the regulatory authorities to proceed with the construction of the Centre, according to the proposed design.
8. The tender for the main construction company has been successfully completed, and the contract with the selected company was signed last week, on 14 April. The construction of the facility will begin, as scheduled, this summer.



9. The funding target for the construction of the ChemTech Centre has now also been met, with over EUR 33.6 million contributed or pledged from 48 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I would like to express my appreciation to all the donors whose contributions have enabled this significant achievement.
10. The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions, which we have started receiving. Such additional donations will provide extra assurances for the successful completion of the project, and for international cooperation projects to be carried out at the Centre as soon as the building is operational. This way, the prestigious Centre will start to produce results from the very beginning.
11. The Secretariat is carefully examining which activities can be delivered at the ChemTech Centre. In this regard, I already started preliminary consultations with States Parties and regional groups to hear and incorporate their priorities into the activities to be offered at the Centre.
12. I intend to proceed with these informal consultations in the coming months. This input is critical to ensuring that a list of well-defined programmes for the Centre is ready when its construction is completed. As you know, our priority is to meet the Convention-related needs of the developing countries.
13. Following the update I provided to you during the first part of the session, on 30 November, the International Cooperation and Assistance Division has continued to implement its activities in 2021, according to a flexible plan. The implementation of the plan will be monitored, and adjusted, throughout the year, in coordination with stakeholders. Since we last met in December, the International Cooperation and Assistance Division has delivered 26 online capacity-building events, benefiting 1,020 participants.
14. In relation to the Syrian Arab Republic, the Secretariat has continued consultations through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT).
15. The twenty-fourth round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian Arab Republic was conducted from 7 to 25 February 2021. The details of this round of consultations are provided in my report to the Council (EC-96/HP/DG.1, dated 5 March 2021).
16. On 21 October 2020, the Secretariat, based on its previous findings, requested Syria to declare the exact types and quantities of chemical weapons produced and/or weaponised at one former chemical weapons production facility (CWPF). This facility was initially declared by the Syrian Arab Republic as having never been used to produce and/or weaponise chemical weapons. Through a note verbale dated 9 March 2021, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterated that this CWPF was never used for the production of chemical weapons. The Secretariat maintains that Syria must declare all chemical warfare agents produced and/or weaponised at this site.
17. During the twenty-fourth round of consultations in February 2021, the DAT shared and discussed with the Syrian National Authority the results of the analysis of samples collected in the Syrian Arab Republic in September 2020 during the twenty-third round of consultations. Syria considered the presence of some of the chemicals in these samples as “unexpected”. On 8 March 2021, Syria submitted a note verbale to the Secretariat providing its explanations regarding the aforementioned sample results.

Through a note verbale dated 16 April 2021, the Secretariat informed Syria that these explanations were assessed as insufficient and unsubstantiated. Accordingly, the DAT will open a new outstanding issue and will further engage in discussions with Syria in this regard.

18. At this stage, considering the issues that remain unresolved, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete.
19. Turning to allegations of use of chemical weapons on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Secretariat provided an update to the Council on the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) through a Note dated 21 December 2020. The FFM deployed to Syria from 29 March to 13 April 2021 to interview witnesses and collect further information regarding an incident that took place in Kafr Zita, Hama, on 1 October 2016. The FFM further continues to analyse information collected from the most recent deployments.
20. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) also continues its mandated activities. The first two transfers of material to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) took place in October and November 2020. The transfers were conducted pursuant to the decision adopted by the Conference on 27 June 2018, and in response to a request received from the IIIM on 28 August 2020.
21. During the first part of this Conference, I reported that following the issuance of the first IIT report on 8 April 2020, the Council, after thorough consideration, adopted a decision on 9 July 2020. This decision requested the Syrian Arab Republic to declare to the Secretariat, within 90 days, the chemical weapons used in the March 2017 attacks in Ltamenah.
22. Under that same decision, Syria was also requested to declare all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses, and to resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration. According to my report to the Council dated 14 October 2020, within the 100 days required by the decision, the Syrian Arab Republic had not completed the measures I have just outlined.
23. On 12 April 2021, the IIT issued a report on the incident that took place in Saraqib, Syria, on 4 February 2018. This is the IIT's second report, following the first issued in April last year covering three cases. The report on Saraqib reached the conclusion that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, on 4 February 2018, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals.
24. These conclusions are based on interviews with persons who were present in the relevant places at the time of the incidents, analyses of samples and remnants collected at the sites of the incidents, a review of the symptomatology reported by casualties and medical staff, examination of imagery, including satellite images, and extensive consultation of experts. The IIT also obtained a topographic analysis of the area in question and gas dispersion modelling to corroborate accounts from witnesses and victims. The investigation relied on the relevant FFM report as well as on samples and other material obtained by the Secretariat.

25. The IIT continues its investigations into several other incidents and will issue further reports.
26. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of the Council decision adopted on 11 November 2016, the Secretariat conducted the seventh round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) between 8 and 13 November 2020.
27. The samples collected during this deployment were sent to designated laboratories for analysis. The outcome of these inspections will be reported in due course.
28. As I have previously reported, a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical was detected during the third round of inspections at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC in November 2018. The Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information, or explanations, regarding this finding.
29. Pursuant to the decision adopted by the Council on 24 July 2014, the Secretariat conducted its final visit to the underground structures in November 2020 and observed the removal of the monitoring equipment. On that occasion the Secretariat reminded Syria that the underground structures should remain sealed as part of the destruction plan agreed by the Council.
30. In relation to the case of Mr Alexei Navalny, I reported in November to the Conference on a request that I received from the Russian Federation for a technical assistance visit under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention.
31. Correspondence regarding this request was exchanged between the Secretariat and the Russian Federation from October to December 2020, to define the legal, technical, operational, and logistical parameters of the visit. All of this correspondence has been made available on the OPCW public website.
32. As the request did not meet the necessary requirements for the Secretariat to assist the Russian Federation in a way similar to how it has assisted other States Parties, the visit did not take place.
33. Referring to destruction-related activities, as at 31 March, a total of 71,271 metric tonnes (MT), or 98.57%, of all declared chemical weapons had been destroyed under verification by the Secretariat.
34. In the United States of America, verification at chemical weapons destruction facilities has continued, thanks to modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.
35. Since last year and because of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the Chairperson of the Council and I have been in close contact with the Permanent Representation of the United States of America with a view to postponing to next year the Council's biennial visit to the United States. It is our hope that the overall situation, including the availability of vaccines, will have improved by then.
36. The destruction, excavation, and recovery operations in regard to abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) in China continue to be suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the resumption of the operations.

37. As at 31 March, almost 83,700 items of ACW had been recovered, of which 57,701 have been destroyed. The Secretariat remains in close contact with China and Japan regarding the latest developments on these matters. Conditions allowing, inspections related to these activities will take place later in the year, in consultation with the concerned States Parties.
38. Given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that the Secretariat will be able to conduct all of its mandated chemical industry inspections for 2021. In the near term, the Secretariat will give particular priority to inspections of Schedule 1 facilities and initial inspections of Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 plant sites.
39. Other chemical industry inspections may be undertaken pursuant to public health and safety guidelines and in close consultation with the relevant National Authorities.
40. Last March, at its Ninety-Sixth Session, the Executive Council adopted a decision entitled “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes”. Following its adoption, the decision will be considered by the Conference at the end of this year.
41. I emphasise, once again, that in light of the increase in demands on the Secretariat’s resources, a budget based on zero nominal growth is not sustainable. The Secretariat is closely monitoring the Organisation’s cash position as well as the impact of the pandemic on programme implementation.
42. I must reiterate the importance for all States Parties to pay your assessed contributions and other reimbursable costs for inspection activities as early as possible. States Parties will continue to be kept informed of the Organisation’s cash position through the Secretariat’s monthly financial situation reports.
43. In the meantime, the transition to a biennial Programme and Budget for the 2022 – 2023 biennium is well under way. This transition will provide a number of benefits, including a longer-term planning approach for States Parties and the Secretariat.
44. I will present the Draft Biennial Programme and Budget for 2022 – 2023 to States Parties in early July. This biennial Programme and Budget will identify the Organisation’s funding needs and set our programmatic activities until the end of 2023. These priorities will be shaped by both the changing security environment and the evolving needs of States Parties.
45. During this part of the Conference, the States Parties will be requested to consider a draft decision pertaining to the appointment of the External Auditor of the OPCW. The position of External Auditor is crucial to ensuring the integrity of the Organisation’s financial situation.
46. As the Organisation moves forward, the retention and development of knowledge and skills will be critical to its success. Accordingly, I am grateful to Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia and Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay for facilitating States Parties’ discussions on several organisational governance topics, including the tenure policy. I am pleased that the Council decided to extend the mandate of the facilitation for the next intersessional period.

47. The Secretariat continues to promote geographical diversity and gender balance. Two and a half years ago, out of 10 upper management positions in the Organisation, only one was held by a woman. Currently, out of the 10 positions in the Organisation's upper management, six are held by women. Each regional group holds two positions.
48. The Secretariat has completed a business impact assessment to determine the capabilities needed to ensure the uninterrupted functioning of the Organisation should a disruption occur. A further need to develop capacities in business continuity was identified. I thank the States Parties that have already provided voluntary contributions to address this matter through the relevant Trust Fund, and I invite others to participate as well.
49. The Organisation has also undertaken ambitious projects to respond to the dual challenges of increasing cybersecurity threats and remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to keep the Secretariat connected and secure.
50. Next week, on 29 April, it will be twenty-four years since the entry into force of the Convention. As we count down to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary in 2022, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the significant achievements of the OPCW in leading the global efforts to eliminate chemical weapons and to prevent their re-emergence.
51. Our world today is very different to the one in 1997 at the founding of this Organisation. To meet present and future challenges, it is imperative for us to keep adapting and evolving in an ever-changing global landscape.
52. In this endeavour, I reaffirm my unwavering personal commitment and that of the Secretariat staff in supporting you, the States Parties, in upholding and reinforcing the norm against the use of chemical weapons.