



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Fifth Session
30 November – 1 December 2020 (Part I)

C-25/NAT.62
30 November 2020
ENGLISH and SPANISH only

PANAMA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ELIZABETH WARD NEIMAN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

As this is my first statement within the framework of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, on behalf of the delegation of Panama, I present my greetings to the Chairperson, the Director-General, the members of the Bureau, and the delegations of the States Parties here today.

Allow me, Your Excellency José Antonio Zabalgotia Trejo, a brief moment to congratulate you on your election. It is an honour to have a distinguished Ambassador of Mexico and the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean acting in the capacity of Chairperson; but I would also like to congratulate you on accepting such a great responsibility in these exceptional times.

Mr Chairperson, please accept our full willingness to support your leadership, and the full confidence that the delegation of Panama places in Your Excellency; we are certain that with your extensive experience and your diplomatic career, you will know how to manage our work successfully. You may count on our collaboration in addressing the agenda under discussion and the firm resolve of Panama to work towards mutual understanding.

Likewise, we express our appreciation for the dedication and professionalism of His Excellency Krassimir Kostov, Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria, having culminated his chairmanship with important achievements.

Over the course of 2020, we encountered challenges mentioned at this very location nearly one year ago; we had no way of evaluating their scope at the time. We have been forced to search for creative solutions and technologies to meet the challenges that have been imposed, challenges that we were unable to foresee.

It is necessary to recognise that a relevant factor in being able to make progress with the various commitments stemming from the Chemical Weapons Convention have been the united efforts of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), led by the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat, together with the community of the States Parties.

This mutual collaboration is an essential tool in continuing to take the steps necessary to carry out the mandate of the Convention and have made it possible to overcome a large part of the difficulties that have emerged since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.



The organisation of logistics sustained for the sake of the health of the Organisation's personnel in compliance with their duties, and the adjustments made to new modalities to ensure that the members of the delegations of States Parties are able to safely participate in sessions of the Executive Council, informal consultations, and working groups—including the Conference—are unquestionable.

In any situation, human life must be preserved, and this has been the premise of Panama in vehemently condemning the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstance, because the loss and suffering of human beings, particularly of those who are most vulnerable, cannot be justified.

With regard to acting in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention, work and activities must go on. For this reason, it is essential to provide the Organisation with the resources necessary for it to operate, the Programme and Budget for 2021, adjusted to the current global situation.

We are aware that we will continue to tackle the inevitable discussions related to budgetary matters and that we will also have to address discussions about the process of transitioning to a biennial budget in 2022 – 2023, but we will do it with the responsibility it deserves.

We understand the need for the COVID-19 Variability Impact Fund and the means to finance it, but the delegation of Panama finds it timely to point out that international cooperation activities contained in the annual programme should be affected as little as possible.

Within this context, it is necessary to note that the National Authorities require, more than ever, the strengthening of their capacities, the assistance and protection programmes, and the consolidation of robust national legislation.

This is critical, since it is with their own national actions that they can promote the use of chemistry for exclusively peaceful purposes and the establishment of conditions of chemical safety that will make it possible for States to respond in a timely manner before any potential incidents take place.

We trust that with the modernisation of the laboratory and storage of OPCW equipment, to be transformed as of 2022 into the Centre for Chemistry and Technology for investigation, analysis, and training, will provide a significant opportunity for States Parties to receive support and specialised training.

On this subject, the consideration of analytical laboratories in the regions of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, with a view to incorporating a network of OPCW designated laboratories, is worthy of special attention. We also take advantage of this opportunity to welcome the progress made in the Africa Programme with respect to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

A global understanding of the threat posed by the re-emergence of the improper use of chemicals should be disseminated by all means possible. On this note, the work of the Advisory Body for Education and Outreach (ABEO) will be essential, and the transition of its work to the e-learning modality is very much in accordance with the time in which we live.

In 2015, the delegation of Panama had the honour to be part of the facilitation establishing this Advisory Body. Today, it is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its actions and the relevance of its initiatives to make education accessible on the non-prohibited use of chemicals in compliance with the Convention.

Likewise, it will be necessary to maintain the valuable contribution made by the facilitators in the field of governance, H.E. Laura Dupuy, Ambassador of Uruguay, and H.E. Matthew Neuhaus, Ambassador of Australia, to whom we extend our recognition of the time they dedicated.

With regard to the situation concerning the Organisation's human resources, it is crucial to understand that the Director-General has promoted initiatives aimed at improving gender parity, but every additional effort is welcome, particularly in terms of concerns regarding the calls for geographical representation.

We equally recognise the management of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism by H.E. Vusimuzi Philemon Madonsela, Ambassador of South Africa, for his timely chairpersonship in terms of underscoring the OPCW's partnerships in the fight against chemical terrorism.

We aspire to a world free of chemical weapons; this central objective requires that adequate verification and inspection standards and regimes serve as a guarantee of procedures and methodologies capable of countering the slightest threat of the use of chemicals as weapons.

For this reason, we recognise the work that the specialised teams of the Technical Secretariat are carrying out, and we have seriously considered each of the reports related to the Syrian Arab Republic. The complexity of that situation and the analysis thereof demands that transparency, impartiality, and objectivity take precedence.

It is with great concern that we take note that the Secretariat is unable to consider their declaration accurate and complete. Another matter of concern remains following the most recent report by the Director-General on decision EC-94/DEC.2, adopted by the Executive Council in June 2020, and we call for valuing the pertinence of the Structured Dialogue established by the Director-General with a view to reaching effective cooperation, as much as is possible.

We now mark the first year after having achieved the milestone of the consensus-supported adoption of two decisions under Article XV of the Convention regarding the amendment of Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals. This has been an unprecedented step—the first-time amendment of the Annex—and should be remembered.

As States Parties, we are implicitly demonstrating the concern about vigilance when it comes to the re-emergence of the improper use of chemicals, and we confirm that dialogue facilitates the identification of points of convergence.

Panama highlights the urgent call of the statement made jointly by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the United States of America, Canada, the Netherlands, Poland, Australia, and other countries, regarding the Navalny case. It gives its full attention to the contents of the report of the Technical Secretariat on the summary of activities carried out in support of Germany's request for technical assistance. We agree that this incident is grounds for serious concern and that, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the use of a nerve agent is deemed the use of a chemical weapon, which is completely reprehensible.

In this regard, the international community has already repeatedly stated that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, and under any circumstance, is unacceptable and is a violation of international norms and standards; for this reason, we call for continuing to work in a transparent manner to clarify the facts.

Five years have passed since the Conference of the States Parties, at its Twentieth Session, decided that the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare would be commemorated on 30 November each year, or the first day of the Conference session.

This commemoration ought to remind us that every threat of the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons must be countered with joint efforts, in the areas of understanding that the multilateral system facilitates and legitimises, and that are translated into tools in favour of building international peace and security.

For this reason, Panama makes an urgent call to unite forces, to allow us to broaden the platform for dialogue in order to jointly attend to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention—our Convention—because we decided to be a part of it.

We will continue to chart the path towards a world free of chemical weapons, and the Republic of Panama once again places its confidence in the mandate of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We kindly request, Mr Chairperson, that this statement be considered an official document.

Thank you.

- - - 0 - - -