



Ninety-Seventh Session
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NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL**RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE THIRTY-FIRST SESSION
OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD
3 – 4 MARCH 2021**

1. This Note presents the Director-General's comments on the report of the Thirty-First Session of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) (SAB-31/1, dated 4 March 2021) and the ongoing work of the Board.
2. Understanding the impact of scientific and technological evolution is a key aspect of the full and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention"). The ongoing work of the OPCW requires scientific guidance. The SAB continues to serve as a welcome and necessary source of scientific advice, assisting the Director-General, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") and, ultimately, the States Parties.
3. Furthermore, the Director-General recognises that six members of the SAB will be leaving the Board in 2021; a formal call for nominations has been issued (S/1927/2021, dated 26 January 2021),¹ with a deadline for submissions of 30 August 2021. The Director-General hopes to receive a variety of nominations meeting the required qualifications and skill sets, as specified in the Note by the Secretariat.

**RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE THIRTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD**

4. The SAB met virtually via the Microsoft Teams platform for its Thirty-First Session on 3 and 4 March 2021. The session was chaired by Chairperson Dr Christophe Curty, and supported by Vice-Chairperson Dr Andrea Leisewitz. The report of the session was issued as SAB-31/1.
5. In her opening remarks (paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3 of SAB-31/1), on behalf of the Director-General, the Director of the Office for Strategy and Policy (OSP) informed the SAB on developments at the OPCW following the Board's Thirtieth Session in November 2020 (SAB-30/1, dated 12 November 2020). The Director of OSP focused her remarks on the current situation and the OPCW's operational posture during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the unique role of the SAB at the OPCW.

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The full Note can be viewed here: <https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2021/01/s-1927-2021%28e%29.pdf>.



6. The OSP Director reminded the SAB members of their continued value to OPCW. The Board's scientific work remains critical, and its advice will be further called upon as the Secretariat continues to adapt and evolve its mission under the auspice of the Convention. She remarked on the need to continue to uphold the rigor of independence for which the Board is known, and the importance of the Board's upcoming scientific report being prepared for the Fifth Review Conference in 2023.²
7. After a careful review of the report of the Thirty-First Session of the SAB, the Director-General is pleased to submit the following comments.

UPDATES FROM THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT (PARAGRAPHS 6.1 TO 6.5 OF SAB-31/1)

8. The Director-General expresses his appreciation to the SAB for their continued efforts during these uncertain times. He appreciates the willingness of the Board to convene virtually, over many time zones, to discuss topics relevant to the Secretariat. It is important that while the SAB provides scientific advice to the Director-General and the Secretariat, it also receives in return updates on matters within the Secretariat that assist the Board in its provision of advice.
9. The Director-General acknowledges the continued participation of SAB members assisting the OPCW with its different projects. He notes in particular the importance of the SAB Trust Fund, a general fund to which States Parties can make contributions that allow the SAB to perform its important work. The balance in the fund is low and the Director-General will continue to communicate to States Parties that any contributions, large or small, are welcome.

CONTINUED PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF PURE AND APPLIED CHEMISTRY (PARAGRAPHS 7.1 TO 7.3 OF SAB-31/1)

10. The President of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), Dr Christopher Brett, updated the Board on IUPAC's strategic plan, vision, mission, and core values. He also provided an overview of current IUPAC initiatives and potential areas for continued and new collaboration. The Director-General congratulates Dr Brett on the excellent work IUPAC is doing and his successful leadership of the organisation. He acknowledges the longstanding and important partnership the OCPW has with IUPAC and fully supports continued collaboration and shared efforts. He hopes, in particular, that IUPAC will be able to partner with the SAB on its preparation for the scientific review to be considered at the OPCW's Fifth Review Conference, as it has for previous review conferences.

EFFECTS OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS ON HUMAN HEALTH AND COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST THEM (PARAGRAPHS 8.1 TO 8.9 OF SAB-31/1)

11. Given the recurring allegations of the use of chemical weapons, in conjunction with the recent addition of new chemical compounds to the Convention's Annex on Chemicals, it is important that the Board periodically receive briefings from scientists who study the toxic effects of chemical weapons and countermeasures against them. The Director-General

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The Fifth Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

notes that it is fortuitous that the Board has two renowned scientists within its membership who research this topic: Dr Zrinka Kovarik and Dr Mostafa Ghanei.

12. The addition of new chemicals to the Convention's Annex on Chemicals in June 2020 is an important moment for the Convention and the OPCW. It comes, however, with the responsibility for the Secretariat to gather, coalesce, and curate all relevant information on these newly scheduled chemicals. The SAB has an important role to play in ensuring that the Secretariat has the appropriate scientific and technical understanding it needs in this regard. While there are many aspects to these chemicals that need further understanding, of particular immediate importance is knowledge about appropriate medical countermeasures and personal protective equipment that can be used in association with them. Dr Kovarik's presentation helped inform the Board and the Secretariat on the complexities of research on nerve agents and the further development needed to identify and develop optimal treatment options.
13. Likewise, the long-term effects of chemical weapons poisoning are still not fully understood. Dr Ghanei's work to monitor and comprehensively research the effects of mustard poisoning is important. The procedures developed and lessons learned in this field, not to mention the data collected, will help complete the picture of the lifelong ramifications of chemical weapons use, further bolstering efforts to ensure the world is free from chemical weapons.

CURRENT AND FUTURE SAB ACTIVITIES (PARAGRAPHS 10.1 TO 10.15 OF SAB-31/1)

14. The SAB will seek to hold its Thirty-Second Session in June 2021. It will continue to hear updates from Secretariat staff and from scientific experts both internal and external to the Board. The SAB has been very active, increasing its efforts in preparing the scientific review in the lead up to the Fifth Review Conference, making proposals for and planning to hold several topical workshops, and establishing and arranging the new Temporary Working Group (TWG) on the analysis of biotoxins. The Director-General thanks Dr Christophe Curty and Dr Zrinka Kovarik for their dedication and leadership of the SAB in their roles as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, respectively, in 2020, a challenging year by any standard. He looks forward to the leadership of Dr Curty as Chairperson and Dr Andrea Leisewitz as Vice-Chairperson throughout the course of 2021.
15. The Director-General read with interest about the progress the Board is making towards its scientific report for the Fifth Review Conference. Both the Director-General and States Parties highly value the scientific report that the SAB generates for each review conference, and appreciate the amount of dedication and work that goes into each one. The Director-General hopes the Board will continue to avail itself of the Secretary to the SAB and any other resources the Secretariat can provide to assist in its preparation of the scientific report.
16. The TWG on the analysis of biotoxins has been established and members have been nominated. As such, its important work can begin soon, with an initial virtual meeting scheduled for early May 2021. In addition to the terms of reference that have been provided to the members of the TWG, and which have been included as an annex to the report of the Thirty-First Session of the SAB, the Director-General reminds the TWG

members of the rules of procedure for the TWG, which mirror those of the SAB and which have been disseminated to all TWG members.³ While the terms of reference serve as the impetus of the TWG, it is the rules of procedure that provide the foundation upon which each member is expected to act and participate to ensure the success of the TWG.

17. The Secretariat has started its plant biomarker challenge. This project serves as an example of the important and innovative research the Secretariat is managing and looks to expand once it can avail itself of the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) in early 2023. Proposals have been received and the technical evaluation team is reviewing the submissions to select proposal teams to present their ideas virtually to the evaluating team. The Director-General notes the participation of two SAB members, Dr Norman Govan and Dr Khaldoun Bachari, on the technical evaluation team and thanks them for their efforts.
18. The Director-General thanks the European Union for its Council Decision 2019/538 of 1 April 2019, which provides funding for both the Plant Biomarker Challenge and the work of the TWGs.
19. The SAB has continued its commendable work in providing scientific advice to the Director-General and Secretariat. The Director-General appreciates the quality and substance of the SAB's continued efforts and recommendations.

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³ Please see the Rules of Procedure for the Scientific Advisory Board and Temporary Working Groups of Scientific Experts: https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/SAB/en/SAB_ToR_RoP.pdf.