

**NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL****UPDATE ON THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S READINESS TO CONDUCT
A CHALLENGE INSPECTION OR AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE****Introduction**

1. The First Review Conference¹ requested the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) to “continue maintaining a high standard of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, to keep the Council informed about its readiness, and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection” (paragraph 7.91 of RC-1/5, dated 9 May 2003).
2. The Second Review Conference reiterated this request to the Secretariat (paragraph 9.90 of RC-2/4, dated 18 April 2008).
3. The First Review Conference also “stressed the importance of investigations of alleged use or threat of use of chemical weapons. For such situations, the OPCW must have the capacity, and be ready at all times, to investigate the need for follow-on action by the OPCW and by individual Member States” (paragraph 7.100 of RC-1/5). The Second Review Conference reiterated this concern (paragraph 9.105 of RC-2/4).
4. The Third Review Conference made two requests of the Secretariat with respect to the conduct of a challenge inspection (CI) or an investigation of alleged use (IAU) (paragraph 9.111 of RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013). The first was that the Secretariat continue to improve the standard of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”). The second was to keep the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) informed about its readiness and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU.
5. The Secretariat has previously submitted to the Council several Notes on its readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU. This Note concentrates on the activities the Secretariat has undertaken since the last update (EC-94/DG.14, dated 25 June 2020), and highlights issues that still require further consideration and attention by States Parties and by the Secretariat.

¹ Review Conference = Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.



The Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell, the Non-Routine Missions Core Team, the Response Teams, the Mission Support Group, and the Situation Centre

6. Since 2016, the Secretariat has assigned a cadre of inspectors to the Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell (CBCP), with the goal of strengthening States Parties' capacity to respond to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, maintaining the Secretariat's preparedness to provide assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons, as well as leading and supporting the conduct of non-routine missions, including CIs and IAUs, in accordance with Articles IX and X of the Convention or the mandate of the Council. The Secretariat has been also working on identifying specific forensic and investigative capabilities that are required for the fulfilment of the Secretariat's mandate and also to enhance the capability to respond to instances involving newly scheduled chemicals.
7. The Secretariat's preparedness has been further enhanced by the creation of a Non-Routine Missions Core Team, with a view to maintain and enhance the Secretariat's ability to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions. Members of the team are selected from the staff across the Inspectorate Division and other parts of the Secretariat and are provided with regular, specialised training, based on recognised needs, operational procedures, and activities and lessons learned from past missions.
8. In order to properly manage the command and control elements of a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission, the Secretariat has developed a Mission Support Group (MSG), along with other operational working groups that meet to work through and actively pursue solutions to complex operational problems in case of a request for a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission.
9. The Situation Centre (SITCEN) is capable of actively managing CI and IAU missions, in addition to routine and non-routine missions taking place at any given moment. The SITCEN provides 24-hour mission support, develops and maintains a comprehensive common operating picture, ensures secure and reliable communications, and provides information analysis to facilitate senior management decision making in support of CIs, IAUs, or any other non-routine missions.

Operational procedures and training of inspectors

10. Inspectorate training programmes in 2020 and 2021 continued to maintain the mandatory qualifications required under the Quality Management System for the conduct of inspection activities and for the preparation of inspectors and inspection team leaders to perform inspection duties for CIs and IAUs or other non-routine missions. There was a continued focus on training inspectors for activities in non-permissive and conflict-affected environments.
11. In 2020, the CBCP coordinated or delivered 1,227 training days, including the mandatory initial training and refresher courses. The training programme comprised 31 individual training courses, and participants included inspectors and Secretariat staff members. A number of inspectors and staff also attended several other training courses, some of which were part of the Secretariat's capacity-building programmes organised for States Parties.

12. In 2020, a group of six new inspectors (Group S) joined the OPCW and completed all mandatory training in order to fulfil the required standards, with the exception of the toxic chemical training (TCT), which could not be completed as a result of the COVID-19-related travel restrictions. The next TCT activity, which will include initial training for Group S and a TCT refresher course for the rest of the staff, is planned to be held from 21 June to 4 July 2021 in Slovakia.
13. In September 2020, the Secretariat conducted a Schedule 1 chemicals course in The Hague for six Group S inspectors. A refresher Schedule 1 chemicals course was conducted online in March 2021 with seven participants. The training is designed to provide detailed knowledge on Schedule 1 chemicals and their properties, toxicology, synthesis, decontamination, and ways to detect and determine their presence during the conduct of OPCW inspections, including CIs, IAUs, or any other non-routine missions.
14. From 7 to 11 December 2020, 10 inspectors took part in an OPCW ordnance training course at the Munitie Technologisch Museum in Landhorst, the Netherlands. The training course combined theory and practical exercises in the identification and functioning of munitions, hazards and safety precautions related thereto, the typical build-up of chemical-filled munitions, and the distinctive features of specific chemical warfare programmes. The course also included the explosive ordnance reconnaissance training.
15. From 25 January to 19 February 2021, two inspectors successfully completed their analytical chemist certification. The four-week specialty training was conducted at the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store in Rijswijk, the Netherlands. The training combined theoretical and practical exercises on the skills required of analytical chemist inspectors. The topics covered all aspects of chemical analysis and reporting, ranging from field detection, sampling in hazardous and non-hazardous environments, the scientific principles of mass spectrometry, the identification of false positives, setting up of an on-site laboratory, instrumentation, sample preparation, and software training for chemical analysis.
16. All planned Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE) training courses, which are a requirement of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security for operations in high-risk environments, were postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A plan is in place to resume SSAFE training activities, and preparations are ongoing for courses that will be offered by Germany. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, as at 19 May 2021, 64 inspectors and other staff members had the SSAFE certification, which qualifies them for operations in the high-risk environments that may be present during CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions.
17. As reported previously, the Secretariat continues to regularly update its existing training programmes, and to develop and implement new ones, aimed at reinforcing its capabilities to conduct non-routine missions by enhancing inspectors' individual skill sets and improving work within the team. In addition to regular training activities, the courses that are particularly relevant to CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions include:
 - (a) non-destructive evaluation training;
 - (b) use of self-contained breathing apparatus;

- (c) command and control of operations;
 - (d) explosive remnants of war awareness training;
 - (e) toxic chemical training with live chemical warfare agents;
 - (f) Schedule 1 chemicals course;
 - (g) forensic training;
 - (h) reconnaissance and sampling; and
 - (i) diplomatic interactions.
18. The Secretariat continued to develop and enhance its activities following the initial adaptation to new circumstances in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Software platforms and the necessary equipment for online work have been further improved to secure continuous operations, as well as the conduct and preparation of various online training activities and workshops. All Secretariat members have been equipped and trained and are well-adapted with the arrangements for working from home. These activities include various knowledge-sharing events, workshops, the review and development of new quality management system documents, the development of online training tools, and the execution and participation in the live online training courses of the OPCW and the external provider.

Non-routine missions

19. The experience gained during the preparation and conduct of missions such as the OPCW Mission in Syria, OPCW fact-finding missions, technical assistance visits, and Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) field exercises has helped the Secretariat to continuously improve procedural and short-notice deployment issues. Moreover, there has been a focus on command and control, communications, information collection and analysis, management of a large deployed team, and executive risk assessment processes, which are skills applicable to a CI or an IAU. To enhance preparedness, the Secretariat conducted one in-house online IAU training course in July 2020 with 61 participants, an online CI training course in February 2021 with 21 participants, and a CI workshop in April 2021 with 75 participants. The CI workshop in April involved the members of the MSG and selected staff members from other divisions of the Secretariat. All training activities were aimed at providing an updated assessment of the fundamentals of CIs and IAUs under Articles IX and X, as well as Part X, Part XI, and the relevant elements of Part II of the Verification Annex to the Convention (hereinafter “the Verification Annex”), as well as experiences and lessons learned from recent non-routine missions. The workshop included lectures and open discussions on gaps and ways to improve specific aspects of CI and IAU activities.
20. From 25 to 30 April 2021, an open source investigation online course was provided by the Institute for International Criminal Investigations, the Netherlands. The course focused on the tools and techniques required for the safe, ethical, and effective gathering of online information. A total of 28 participants whose work is related to non-routine missions took part in this activity.

Equipment and laboratories

21. Since last year's report (EC-94/DG.14), the Secretariat has informed States Parties of the procurement of a number of new items of approved inspection equipment that conform to the operational requirements and technical specifications approved by the Conference of the States Parties. The Secretariat informed the States Parties of the newly procured items of approved equipment through Notes S/1888/2020 (dated 11 August 2020), S/1909/2020 (dated 27 October 2020), and S/1954/2021 (dated 23 April 2021). This additional medical, non-destructive evaluation, recording, communication, and sampling equipment has helped to increase the operational readiness and capabilities of the OPCW, particularly in respect of possible cases of CIs, IAUs, and other non-routine missions.
22. Based on the experience gained from the deployment to non-routine missions at short notice in recent times, the OPCW Equipment Store has the necessary supplies and equipment and requisite preparedness to support an inspection team deployment within the time frames specified in the Convention, or to meet other short-notice operational requirements.
23. The Secretariat maintains a network of designated laboratories available to carry out the off-site analysis of samples in support of a CI, an IAU, or other non-routine mission. The list of designated laboratories is updated following proficiency testing. The current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic environmental samples can be found in Notes S/1866/2020 (dated 31 March 2020), S/1893/2020 (dated 2 September 2020), and S/1941/2021 (dated 25 March 2021).

Issues requiring further action by the Secretariat

24. CIs and IAUs are key deterrent elements of the Convention, aimed at eliminating the risk of production, storage, and use and threat of use of chemical weapons. Since entry into force of the Convention, no CIs or IAUs have been requested by a State Party.
25. Activities planned for the conduct of field exercises in 2020 were impacted by the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the initiative is planned to continue in 2021 in order to ensure that the Secretariat's staff will be well prepared for any CI or IAU.
26. Following the creation of the CBCP and the preparation of an expanded group of trained inspectors to form the Non-Routine Missions Core Team, the Secretariat has further enhanced the rapid deployment concept by selecting and training other Secretariat staff to be prepared and trained to deploy in and conduct CIs and IAUs at short notice. Experiences and lessons learned from non-routine missions and exercises have been utilised in order to maintain the preparedness to successfully conduct a CI or IAU with smaller teams that are more efficient and adaptable. This approach will cause less impact on routine missions, once the full operational readiness of prepared response teams has been reached. The Secretariat fully appreciates the support of Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in supporting training opportunities in 2020 and 2021.

27. Moving forward, the Secretariat will continue its efforts towards maintaining preparedness to conduct a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission by addressing several facets of staffing, preparedness procedures, enhanced coordination, interagency cooperation, and required technological means. This is achieved, inter alia, by: updating the job descriptions of inspectors, specifically looking for forensic experience and criminal investigation expertise; working with relevant United Nations and other agencies such as the International Criminal Police Organization, the World Health Organization, and the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention to facilitate knowledge sharing and interagency cooperation; developing and facilitating relevant training programmes; and using technologies to assist in the successful completion of CI and IAU missions. Establishing effective and efficient preparedness requires the necessary human and financial resources, particularly with regard to ensuring that the OPCW can always attract and retain the human resources necessary to address both routine and emerging requirements in an increasingly dynamic environment in which fewer and fewer potential candidates have chemical weapons experience.
28. The Secretariat is currently pursuing bilateral agreements with interested States Parties to provide independent air transport at short notice, in order to ensure the rapid deployment of teams. Efforts will continue to receive more support in providing independent air transport means and pre-approved flight clearances for non-scheduled aircraft to further solidify the Secretariat's preparedness to conduct CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions in the future. This has proved to be especially important in the case of imposed transport limitations, such as those experienced as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Issues requiring further action by States Parties

29. As mentioned in previous reports, the ability of the OPCW to respond promptly to requests for a CI and/or an IAU could be seriously affected by a lack of standing arrangements that require action by States Parties in accordance with Part II of the Verification Annex:
- (a) In accordance with paragraph 10 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to provide designated OPCW inspectors with multiple-entry visas that are valid for at least two years. As at 19 May 2021, 135 States Parties (70%) had either issued, or promised to issue, two-year multiple-entry visas, or had no visa requirements for OPCW inspectors travelling with a United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP); 31 States Parties (16%) had issued multiple-entry visas valid for one year (or less); and 27 States Parties (14%) had either not responded or had provided incomplete general visa information that does not apply to OPCW inspectors travelling on UNLPs. It may be worthwhile recalling that States Parties that impose visa requirements on UNLP holders could also consider agreeing to a waiver of the standard visa requirements for UNLP holders in the event of a CI or an IAU.
 - (b) In accordance with paragraph 16 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to designate the points of entry that are to be used by mission teams. As at 19 May 2021, 139 States Parties had provided information regarding points of entry.

- (c) In accordance with paragraph 22 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to inform the Secretariat of the standing diplomatic clearance number (SDCN) for non-scheduled aircraft. As at 19 May 2021, 23 States Parties had provided SDCNs on a permanent basis, while 16 had provided information on expediting them in the event that a requirement arises. It should be noted that an additional 39 States Parties provide SDCNs on an annual basis.
- (d) In accordance with paragraph 44 of Part II of the Verification Annex, inspectors shall have the right to communicate with the Headquarters of the Organisation and to use their own two-way system of communications between team members during inspections. Accordingly, States Parties must inform the OPCW of the radio frequencies available for use by the inspection teams for such purposes. As at 19 May 2021, 80 States Parties had provided frequencies or had given the Secretariat authorisation to use OPCW default frequencies and/or had provided conditions for their use, or confirmed or provided information on an expedited method for obtaining the necessary frequencies in 2021. Finally, 113 States Parties have not provided any records regarding radio frequencies.

Conclusion

- 30. The full range of operations, in-house workshops, and training courses that have taken place during the reporting period has augmented the preparedness of the Secretariat to conduct effective CIs, IAUs, or other non-routine missions at short notice. The transition to online activities and enhancement of the distance-learning approach continued to ensure the continuity of the capacity-building process and mitigate the disruption caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Secretariat will maintain its preparedness to deploy to operations at short notice and will continue to plan and conduct exercises in cooperation with a variety of international actors, with the support of States Parties. This will increase the preparedness and capabilities of the Secretariat in the event of a CI, IAU, or other non-routine mission. The Secretariat reiterates its appreciation for the assistance that States Parties have extended thus far, and hopes that this will continue. As in the past, the Secretariat would like to encourage States Parties to come forward to jointly organise, participate in, and conduct exercises, training, and other operational activities.