OPCW

Technical Secretariat

NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

UPDATE ON THE SECURE INFORMATION EXCHANGE SYSTEM

Introduction

1.   The timely exchange of information between the States Parties and the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") is crucial for the effective and efficient implementation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention").

2.   The traditional way of exchanging classified information, through diplomatic pouch, imposes logistical difficulties. These can cause delays and may, therefore, adversely affect the timely fulfilment by the States Parties of their obligations under the Convention, including the timely submission of declarations. This may also have repercussions for important activities carried out by the Secretariat, such as the evaluation of declarations and the planning of inspections.

3.   To address this issue, the Secretariat has designed and put in place a system for the secure electronic transmission of classified documents, known as the Secure Information Exchange (SIX) system, in accordance with the Note by the Secretariat on this subject (S/1192/2014, dated 1 July 2014).

4.   The present Note describes the current status of the SIX system and the priorities for the future of this critical communication mechanism. A previous update was provided to the States Parties last year (S/1891/2020, dated 31 August 2020).

Overview of system utilisation

5.   The SIX system is an established system for secure communication between the Secretariat and the States Parties. As at 31 July 2021, 61 States Parties had registered for the SIX system, resulting in authorisation for 107 individual users to use the system. An up-to-date list of registered States Parties is maintained on the dedicated section of the OPCW external server.[1]

6.   States Parties from all OPCW regional groups are represented among the users, with 29.5% from the Group of Western European and Other States, 24.5% from Asia, 23.0% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 16.4% from Eastern Europe, and 6.6% from Africa.

---

[1]   See the "SIX Documents" link on the left-hand side of the OPCW external server home page.

7.   In the 2021 declaration round for past activities, 38 declarations were submitted using the SIX system, which represents approximately half the number of declarations received by the Secretariat. The use of electronic declaration transmission enables States Parties to dedicate more time to the preparation of declarations and benefit from a more efficient and streamlined declaration submission process. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SIX system has demonstrated its usefulness and the benefit of replacing the traditional hand delivery of declarations and other related documents.

8.   Since its initial release in 2014, the Secretariat has received 1,539 documents from States Parties through the SIX system. The majority of these documents have been annual declarations of past and anticipated activities, as well as amendments to previously submitted declarations under Article VI of the Convention. In addition, other types of documents have been received via the SIX system including declarations under other articles of the Convention, responses to official letters from the Secretariat, and operational documents related to the SIX system itself.

9.   Regarding the submission of documents from the Secretariat to the States Parties, the SIX system is increasingly being used for the transmission of facility reconciliation letters and final inspection reports.

Current and future activities

10.   Since the system was launched, the majority of activities undertaken by the Secretariat involving the SIX system have focused on providing support to the States Parties in regard to registering and using the system, enhancing the system's security and usability, and promoting the benefits of its use. Presentations and demonstrations of the SIX system have been included in the training courses provided by the Secretariat for National Authorities.

11.   To ensure that the SIX system is available to users and remains a secure means of transmission, the Secretariat facilitates regular system updates, maintenance, and security audits.

12.   In February 2021, the Secretariat distributed new dual-factor authentication tokens to all SIX users. This aligned system access security measures across all SIX users.

13.   The Secretariat is evaluating the potential expansion of the system to include the transmission of classified documents under other articles of the Convention, such as Article X.

Conclusion

14.   Since its initial launch, the SIX system has continued to create efficiencies for the Secretariat and the States Parties by providing a secure and efficient mechanism to transmit classified information. The Secretariat will continue its efforts to increase and expand the use of the system, as well as to further improve the quality of this service for the benefit of States Parties.

15.   Further questions or comments concerning SIX can be sent to:

Data Analytics, Reporting and Quality Control Section
Declarations Branch, Verification Division
OPCW
Johan de Wittlaan 32
2517 JR The Hague
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 (0)70 416 3671
Email: six@opcw.org

- - - o - - -