



## **Remarks by the OPCW Director-General, at the Briefing for non-Hague based Permanent Representations to the OPCW**

**As delivered on 12 November 2021, The Hague, Netherlands**

[Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you with great pleasure to this annual briefing for Permanent Representations to the OPCW based outside The Hague. The aim of this meeting is to highlight the OPCW's activities this year, and to assist you with preparations for the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

Once again, it has been necessary to hold this event remotely, due to the ongoing pandemic. I very much value your flexibility and your participation.

The OPCW's founding goal of achieving a world free of chemical weapons and safe and secure in the use of chemicals, requires the goodwill, commitment, and the effort of all States Parties. Your engagement with the OPCW is therefore essential to ensuring it is able to deliver on this and all our important mandates.

The Organisation continues to make advances across all four pillars of the Convention.

In particular, we are moving closer to achieving the goal of eliminating declared chemical weapons. As at 31 October, 98.90% of all declared stocks had been verified as eliminated with the final 1.10% to be destroyed by 2023, when the United States is expected to complete its stockpile destruction.

Concerning Article VI inspections of the chemical industry, the Secretariat has been ramping up inspections as the pandemic evolves. We now expect to complete 80 inspections this year as we did in 2020 with priority being given to inspections of Schedule 1 facilities and initial inspections of Schedule 2 and 3 plant sites.

The Secretariat's International Cooperation and Assistance Division has also been persevering with its programmatic activities, under the conditions imposed by the pandemic. This year, the Division has held 64 virtual events, benefitting 3,129 participants. These events have been conducted online, and the Secretariat is closely monitoring the evolving conditions, with a view to resuming in-person events as soon as feasible. Ms Kayoko Gotoh, Director of the International Cooperation and Assistance Division, will give a more comprehensive overview of the activities of International Cooperation later.

Since 2007, the Secretariat has been delivering tailored assistance to African States Parties through the Africa Programme. Last year, the Secretariat launched the fifth phase of the Programme, following consultations with States Parties. We are maintaining dialogue and

coordination on its progress through its Steering Committee, which will hold its fourth meeting next week.

Mr Dawsar Drissi from the International Cooperation and Assistance Division will provide you with a detailed update on the activities and achievements of the current phase. He will also cover the Secretariat's preparations for engaging with African Member States on the Sixth Phase of the Programme, which will begin in 2023.

While acknowledging this progress, we must also recognise the existing challenges and those that lie ahead. It is a disturbing reality that chemical weapons continue to be used, which we have witnessed in Malaysia, Iraq, Syria, the United Kingdom, and now the Russian Federation.

In 2021, we entered the eighth year of our engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues to engage with Syria to resolve the gaps and inconsistencies in its initial declaration. Since April 2021, the Secretariat has been attempting to deploy the DAT to Syria for the 25th round of consultations in Damascus. The Syrian National Authority decided not to issue visas to all members of the DAT to deploy to Syria. Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013), the Syrian National Authority is to provide full and unfettered access to experts designated by the OPCW. Accordingly, the Syrian National Authority is not to decide the composition of the Secretariat's teams sent to Syria.

After unsuccessfully trying to convene a limited meeting in The Hague with Syrian experts, the Secretariat informed the Syrian National Authority that the DAT will not be deployed until visas have been issued to all members of the team. The Secretariat will continue to ensure that Syria clarifies the shortcomings identified in its initial declaration and that it complies with all of its obligations under the Convention, the decisions of the Policy-Making Organs of the Organisation, and the resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations.

The Secretariat is preparing the next round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies Research Centre, but these inspections remain subject to the evolution of the pandemic.

The work of the Fact-Finding Mission is ongoing, and the team continues to engage with the Syrian authorities and other States Parties on alleged incidents as it plans future deployments.

Moving now to the Investigation and Identification Team. The team has been striving since its creation in 2019 to fulfil the task of identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In April this year, the IIT issued its second report in which it concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe the Tiger Forces of the Syrian Arab Airforce used chlorine as a weapon at Saraqib in February 2018. The IIT is also continuing its investigations and will issue further reports in due course, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April, the Conference of the States Parties adopted the decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic". The decision expressed grave concern at the proven cases of chemical weapons use in Syria and decided to suspend the following rights and privileges of this State Party:

- to vote in the Conference and the Council;
- to stand for election to the Council; and
- to hold any office of the Conference, the Council or any subsidiary organs of the OPCW.

These rights will only be reinstated once I have reported that Syria has completed measures set out in the decision of the Executive Council adopted in July last year.

The case of Mr Alexei Navalny has also been a matter of concern at the OPCW. On 20 August 2020, Mr Navalny, a Russian citizen and political activist, was poisoned in Russia. Two days later, he was transported to Berlin where he was treated.

On 4 September 2020, in response to a request from the Federal Republic of Germany, a team of experts from the Secretariat travelled to Berlin, and independently collected biomedical samples from Mr Navalny, with his consent, for analysis by OPCW designated laboratories. The results of the analysis confirmed that traces were found in Mr Navalny's blood of a nerve agent, with similar structural characteristics as the toxic chemicals of the novichok family that were recently added to the schedules of chemicals of the Annex to the Convention. You will recall that, the Chemical Weapons Convention established 3 lists, the so-called schedules 1, 2 and 3, containing the most dangerous chemicals. All those chemicals included in the lists are subject to declaration by the possessor states and inspections by the Secretariat of the Organisation.

Following the events where chemical weapons were used, the schedules of chemicals I just mentioned were amended by the Conference of the States Parties, in November 2019, adding several chemicals belonging to the family of novichok nerve agent. It was the first time since the entry into force of the Convention that this list was amended.

On 6 October 2020, the Secretariat received a request from the Russian Federation for a technical assistance visit concerning the incident of Mr Navalny. Correspondence regarding this request was exchanged between the Secretariat and the Russian Federation, and made available on the OPCW public website. 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.

On 5 October 2021, 45 States Parties submitted a series of questions to the Russian Federation on the poisoning of Mr Navalny on Russian territory, pursuant to Article IX paragraph 2 of the Convention. This article allows States Parties to request, from another State Party, clarification of any matter which causes doubt or concern relating to the implementation of the Convention. The Russian Federation partially responded to the request for clarification on 7 October. Together with this response, the Russian Federation further submitted on 7 October, its own request under Article IX paragraph 2 to France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. All of these States Parties responded to Russia's request on 18 October. The aforementioned documents have been circulated as official documents of the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council, as requested by the concerned States Parties.

These current issues underscore the OPCW's long-term goal of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and their use. Towards this effort, we must keep pace of developments in science and technology.

Our new Centre for Chemistry and Technology will play an integral role in this regard. The Centre will offer training capabilities for inspectors, and capacity building for national experts from States Parties, as well as offer a unique hub for international cooperation. The new laboratory will equip the Organisation with the tools and resources needed to adapt to new developments in science and technology.

The project itself has advanced steadily within the planned timeline and budget. Construction began in June at the Centre's site and a ceremony to mark the symbolic placement of the first pillar was held on 23 September.

The funding target for this Centre has been met, with over EUR 33.65 million contributed or pledged from 51 countries, the European Union and other donors. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all contributors for their generous support. The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions, which will be devoted to equipment and programmes.

The Secretariat has been working with States Parties to prepare a dossier of potential projects that can be carried out at the Centre as soon as the construction is completed. This input is critical to ensuring that a list of well-defined programmes for the Centre is ready as soon as its construction is completed. I continue to encourage all States Parties from all regions to pledge financial support for this project, with amounts that suit their situation.

I turn now to the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, which will start in The Hague on 29 November. This year, we again have taken into consideration the COVID-19 situation and the Dutch regulations related to the pandemic. The Secretariat will again be implementing health and safety measures to limit risks for all participants and Secretariat staff while ensuring that we fulfil our obligations under the Convention. I encourage all Permanent Representations to send representatives to The Hague to participate in the proceedings. I look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible.

The Conference will discuss, and adopt decisions on a number of important issues, including the OPCW's first biennium Programme and Budget for 2022-2023. After a decade of largely unmitigated loss of purchasing power due to inflation, the traditional level of OPCW activities could not be maintained with a zero nominal-growth approach. The budget for 2022 will be EUR 70.45 million, while for 2023 it will amount to EUR 72.56 million. I would like to underline that in the budget for 2022-2023, focus was placed on the use of a zero-real growth budgeting approach across the Organisation. This takes into consideration past patterns of expenditure and the use of standard costs when formulating resource requirements.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

As we near the completion of the destruction of declared chemical weapons, the OPCW continues to adapt and evolve to meet States Parties' needs, and to the changing security landscape. The next few years will offer significant opportunities for us to collectively reflect on our achievements, as well as consider existing and future challenges for the organisation.

In 2022, we will mark the 25th Anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention. The ChemTech Centre is due to be completed by the end of 2022 and the facility will become

operational in 2023. In April 2023, the Fifth Review Conference will be convened. Also in 2023, the 30th Anniversary of the Opening for Signature of the Convention will take place.

As we enter this historic period, the ongoing support and commitment of all States Parties will be vital in upholding the global norm against the use of chemical weapons. You can count on the dedication, independence, and expertise of the Secretariat to support you in this shared endeavour.

I thank you for your attention.

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