



Opening Remarks by the OPCW Director-General at the 23rd Annual Meeting of National Authorities (online)

As delivered on 23 November 2021, The Hague, Netherlands

Excellencies,
Dear participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you to the 23rd Annual Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

During this challenging period, the Secretariat has evolved and adapted in order to continue delivering capacity-building support to our States Parties, as this virtual event demonstrates. I am very pleased that this important Annual Meeting is the first event of this kind to be hosted by the Secretariat with interpretation in all six of the OPCW's official languages.

The Annual Meeting serves as a forum for communication and exchange between the National Authorities, and with the OPCW on the effective implementation of the Convention. More than 200 representatives of National Authorities from more than 100 States Parties from all regions of the world are attending this event today.

Your participation demonstrates the dedication and commitment of States Parties to the Convention. Its full and effective implementation contributes to international peace and security. The Secretariat's capacity-building programmes are important to supporting our States Parties in this regard. In response to input from States Parties, this year's meeting focuses on the OPCW's capacity-building support in chemical security, particularly related to Articles VII, X, and XI.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As at 31 October, 98.9% of all declared chemical weapons stocks had been verified as destroyed. The remainder is on track to be destroyed by 2023, when the United States is expected to complete its stockpile destruction.

As we near this milestone, the OPCW is strengthening its focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Full and effective implementation of the Convention continues to be our first line of defence in this regard.

To date, 118 of 193 States Parties have adopted legislation that comprehensively implements their obligations under the Convention. This leaves 40 States Parties with legislation covering some of the initial measures, and 35 that do not have, or have not reported, adopting any legislation at all.

Full legal implementation of the Convention, however, is within our reach. It is important to note that 70 States Parties have draft legislation pending before government or parliamentary bodies.

National Authorities play a critical role during this legislative adoption process. The level of your commitment and knowledge can have a profound effect on the passage of a country's draft bill. The Secretariat works with National Authorities to boost their capacity to promote treaty implementation and to encourage national momentum whenever possible.

To this end, we have been providing online support to States Parties to identify potential gaps in your existing legal frameworks. Increasingly, the Secretariat supports States Parties in addressing legislative and regulatory issues related to chemical security. As a result, the Secretariat will strengthen and tailor capacity-building activities to address gaps and fulfil needs in this area, in line with the guidance from the OPCW Policy-Making Organs.

The Secretariat will also continue to promote and facilitate closer cooperation between National Authorities and the chemical industry and customs administrations. During this meeting, we will share our efforts on chemical security and will facilitate discussions among representatives on ways to meet States Parties' needs.

On implementing Article X, the Secretariat is making full use of available communication technologies to connect experts across regions, to help States Parties on this matter. Virtual courses this year on the use of chemical emergency management tools, such as WISER or Emergency Response Guide, have successfully enabled knowledge transfer between States Parties in the regions involved. The OPCW has been encouraging gender equality and inclusiveness through its "Women in Chemistry" programme and its "International Online Workshop for Women in a First Responder Role to Chemical Incidents". A recent webinar brought together African States Parties to exchange technical knowledge on chemical security and emergency response for large public events. It had a particular focus on Cameroon that will host the Africa Cup on Nations.

The Secretariat also continues to deliver assistance to States Parties in the implementation of Article XI. I wish to highlight that our collective efforts to expand laboratory capabilities have yielded significant progress. In 2021, a Brazilian laboratory achieved OPCW designated laboratory status, which is the first for the GRULAC region and a landmark moment for the Organisation. The Secretariat will continue to provide tailored support in this field, with a view to replicating this success in other regions.

On the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre, I am pleased to share with you some important points. Firstly, the funding target for the Centre has been met, with over EUR 33.7 million contributed or pledged from 51 countries, the European Union and other donors. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all contributors for their crucial support. The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions, which will be devoted to equipment and programmes.

Construction of the Centre began in June this year and a ceremony to mark the symbolic placement of the first pillar was held on 23 September, in presence of more than 80 Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives. The ChemTech Centre is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022 and is expected to start operations in the spring of 2023.

It will offer training capabilities for inspectors and capacity building for national experts from States Parties, as well as a unique hub for international cooperation. The Secretariat is in the process of preparing a dossier of potential projects to be carried out at the Centre, that would best respond to States Parties needs and priorities. To that end, the Secretariat has launched a

series of consultations with States Parties and Regional Groups regarding the future activities of the Centre.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the OPCW continues to evolve in a changing security environment, our priorities will require a range of activities to ensure the Organisation remains fit for purpose. We will need to continue to strengthen engagement with diverse stakeholders around the globe to effectively prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

National Authorities are an integral part in this respect as they are actively involved in the Convention's implementation on the ground. Your efforts and interest will help increase awareness of the new tasks to be tackled and recognise the opportunities for collaboration to address them.

While the global security landscape is more demanding, effective national implementation will remain the basis for the ongoing success of the Convention. It is my hope, that your deliberations over the coming days will be very fruitful and serve as a renewed basis for our common work.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive and engaging meeting.
