



Introductory Remarks by OPCW Director-General, Fernando Arias, at the Fourth Meeting of the OPCW Africa Programme Steering Committee

15 November 2021, The Hague, Netherlands

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to address the Fourth meeting of the Steering Committee of the OPCW Africa Programme. I wish to join the Chairperson, Ambassador Lawrence Lenayapa, of Kenya, in extending a warm welcome to all Committee members and observers.

Mr Chairperson,

The Secretariat has continued to achieve significant progress in the implementation of the 5th Phase of the Africa programme, since the last Committee meeting, on the 25th of June this year.

In the area of capacity-building, which is the backbone of the programme, the Secretariat has intensified the delivery of its online training activities. Since the last meeting of this Committee, four and a half months ago, the Secretariat has delivered 18 online capacity building activities under the Programme, including six activities specifically for the Africa region. A total of 527 participants from 38 African States Parties benefitted from them.

These capacity building activities continue to address the needs and priorities expressed by African member states, including:

- Improving the national implementation of the Convention;
- Enhancing the effectiveness of National Authorities;
- Improving control over cross-border transfers of scheduled chemicals;
- Developing assistance and protection capabilities against chemical incidents and attacks;
- Educating on chemical safety and security management; and
- Upgrading laboratory competencies across the continent.

Objectives 1 and 2 of the Programme are related to the domestication of the Convention and the empowering of National Authorities. In line with them, the Secretariat's activities over this period focused on increasing the capabilities of African Member States in fulfilling declarations and inspections obligations, under Article VI of the Convention.

The Secretariat's activities were also geared towards enhancing the interaction among the National Authorities, and between the National Authorities and the chemical industry, as well as on legislative and regulatory issues, related to chemical security.

Let me also highlight the upcoming Annual Meeting of National Authorities, which will be held next week; more than 50 participants from the African region, representing more than 20 States Parties, are expected to attend.

Objective 3 is related to control over cross-borders transfers of toxic chemicals. In line with this, the Secretariat focused on training on the transfers regime under the Convention, and on strengthening the analytical skills in laboratories supporting customs services in Africa.

Objective 4 is related to assistance and protection. In line with this, the Secretariat focused, during the reporting period, on developing capacities of African States parties in relevant areas.

These include:

- decontamination of chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals;
- sampling and analysis in a highly contaminated environments;
- as well as the use of electronic tools for first response to chemical emergencies.

Furthermore, the Secretariat offered support to Cameroon in its preparations for the upcoming African Cup of Nations, by organising in September a webinar on Response Measures and Emergency Response Arrangements, for Major Public Events. The Secretariat will also support an ensuing national workshop for Cameroon, scheduled to take place from 29 November to 3 December, in Yaoundé.

Last September, the Secretariat organised the First International Online Workshop for Women in a First Responder role, to Chemical Incidents. The workshop accommodated 28 female first responders, from 8 African States Parties.

The briefing that will be delivered by the ICA Team today will cover, in greater detail, these and other specific projects of relevance to African States Parties.

Turning to the 5th and 6th objectives: the Secretariat continued to promote chemical safety and security and upgrade laboratory competencies across the Africa region. The nine capacity-building activities, that were delivered in this connection during the reporting period, focused on chemical safety and security management, including in Small and Medium-Size Enterprises, as well as on laboratory competencies, including for preparations to OPCW proficiency tests.

Under the Laboratory Twinning and Assistance Programme, the Secretariat continues to facilitate assistance to laboratories in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa through specific projects. The aim is to enhance their analytical capabilities and technical competencies to secure the OPCW designated laboratory status. This is done with the financial support of the EU and the United Kingdom.

A new project involving a German Laboratory, as assisting laboratory, and the National Institute of Criminalistics and Criminology of the National Gendarmerie in Algeria, as assisted laboratory, is underway. I thank the European Union for funding such a project.

In objective 7, related to the area of promoting exchange of chemistry knowledge, the Secretariat sponsored 137 African scientists to attend two international conferences. The Secretariat also funded five African fellowships and 12 research projects, including eight projects jointly with the International Foundation for Science.

The last one is objective 8: under this point, the Secretariat continued to improve the visibility of the Africa Programme, in accordance with the 5th Phase planning, thereby increasing the engagement and the support of different stakeholders.

In this connection, I am pleased to note that the OPCW Africa Network continues to be developed and maintained. The Network is a reliable platform for information and interaction on matters related to the Convention. It now counts more than 850 African chemistry professionals and programme stakeholders, as members.

The Secretariat has recently issued the second edition of the OPCW Africa Bulletin. The bulletin offers a closer look into the Programme's developments in 2021, and shares experiences and insights of African National Authorities. The feedback we have received on the bulletin is very positive. I take this opportunity to thank the National Authorities of Nigeria, Mauritania and South Africa for contributing articles to this edition. I encourage similar contributions to future editions.

Mr Chairperson,

The Secretariat has continued to develop relevant partnerships, with a view to ensuring a more effective implementation of the Africa Programme. Our partners include international, regional and national organisations, academia and laboratories, chemical associations, as well as national training institutions.

Cooperation has continued since the latest Committee meeting with a variety of international organisations. At the continental level, contacts have been maintained with the African Union's Commission for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

The Secretariat endeavours to reactivate the bilateral cooperation with the African Union, along the lines of the action plan proposed to the Commission in December 2020. The Secretariat would highly appreciate the support of the African Group and the Steering Committee members in this regard.

Mr Chairperson,

The Africa Programme continues to be essentially funded through the OPCW regular budget. To further expand its potential and impact, the Secretariat has spared no effort to mobilise additional funding, to top up the already significant regular budget resources available for Africa. Through these efforts, the Africa Programme was able to add over 20% more funding to its original budget.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat intensified its fundraising efforts to attract financial support for the 10 special extra-budgetary projects, developed under the 5th Phase. I am pleased to report that four of these ten projects, have now received full financial support. I thank France and the United States of America in this connection.

Following discussions with the Global Partnership earlier this year, Canada indicated that it is considering providing funding for two other projects. The Secretariat continues to have productive discussions with Canada to that end, while seeking donors for the four remaining projects.

I also thank all other donors, for their relevant and continuing support of capacity building activities. I recognise, with high appreciation, the recent voluntary contribution made also by the United Kingdom, to fund phase 3 of the ongoing project, aimed at assisting laboratory capacities in Africa and GRULAC to achieve OPCW designated laboratory status.

My sincere thanks also go to the African States Parties that have been partnering with the Secretariat, for the delivery of numerous activities under the Programme, during the past period. I encourage African States Parties to join the Secretariat's efforts to identify and secure additional funding. The briefing today will provide you with more details on the fundraising status, and will highlight the special projects still open for voluntary contributions.

Mr Chairperson,

On the Centre for Chemistry and Technology—the ChemTech Centre: The placement of the first pillar ceremony was held on 23 September 2021, to officially mark the start of construction of the Centre. The construction of the ChemTech Centre is currently planned to be completed by the end of 2022, and the facility will become operational in 2023. I hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will not create in the next few months even more difficulties than those that we have already suffered.

The Centre will allow the Organisation to meet the needs of States Parties, including in the framework of the Africa Programme. It will do so by providing capacity building in chemical security and assistance and protection, and by fostering international cooperation, to guarantee the peaceful uses of chemistry.

In this regard, I started preliminary consultations, several months ago, with member states and regional groups, to define and develop the future activities that the Centre will offer. The Centre's enhanced and enlarged laboratory, classrooms, and practical training areas will greatly benefit professionals, and experts from States Parties, including from Africa.

The funding target for the construction of the ChemTech Centre has now also been met, with over EUR 33.65 million, contributed or pledged from more than 51 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I would like to express my appreciation to all the donors, whose contributions have enabled this significant achievement.

The ChemTech Centre Trust Fund remains open for further contributions, which we have continued receiving. Such additional donations will provide extra assurances for the successful completion of the project, and for new programmes to be carried out at the Centre, as soon as the building is operational. I renew my appeal to African States Parties that have not contributed yet, to consider supporting the ChemTech Centre project with voluntary contributions.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the Secretariat's unwavering commitment to supporting the needs and priorities of African States Parties in particular, through the Africa Programme. I wish you every success in this meeting, and I look forward to our continued collaboration and mutual support.

Thank you.
