



OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS NINETY-NINTH SESSION

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to our first session of the Executive Council this year.
2. I wish in particular to welcome the new Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Dr Eniola Olaitan Ajayi, Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the OPCW. Ambassador, we have been working together to prepare your candidacy. It has been a real pleasure, because I observed your many professional and personal qualities and I am confident that with your rich experience, this Council will continue to successfully fulfil its obligations under the Convention.
3. I extend my profound appreciation to Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco for skilfully steering this Council through many crucial moments during his term as Chairperson.
4. Upon his departure in January, the Council's work continued under the able guidance of the acting Chairperson, Ambassador Gudrun Lingner of Germany, to whom I also convey my profound gratitude for her generosity and competence during this period.
5. The current security environment in the world has seriously deteriorated over the past two weeks. In such dramatic circumstances, it is important to recall that the OPCW is a disarmament organisation that works for peace and international security, with humanitarian and environmental components. This is embedded in the Preamble of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In it, you, States Parties, reaffirm your determination to act with a view to achieving effective progress towards general and complete disarmament, including the prohibition and elimination of weapons of mass destruction.
6. You, States Parties, further agreed in this Preamble to contribute to the realisation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, that must have our unwavering support. These purposes and principles include friendly relations among nations, peaceful settlement of international disputes, self-determination, and refraining from the threat or use of force.
7. At the OPCW, these purposes and principles have been taken very seriously. Today, there are fears and threats of use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons in Ukraine. Before I elaborate later in my statement on the impact of this on the Organisation's activities, I wish to share my sympathy for the victims of this armed conflict, and call for the respect of all international norms, including the Chemical Weapons Convention.



8. We meet, once again, in an adapted modality, to ensure the health and safety of all delegates and Technical Secretariat staff. Although many restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have been lifted or relaxed, the number of cases remains high.
9. We are taking a cautious approach in lifting our restrictions, in line with the Dutch Government's guidance and the Secretariat's risk assessment. We have commenced the implementation of the third phase of our roadmap on the return of OPCW staff to our premises. In this context, I welcome the engagement of States Parties, led by Germany, on the proposal for convening Council sessions or meetings in emergency circumstances.
10. During this session, the Council will decide on its new composition as of 12 May 2022.
11. We ended 2021 with several critical outcomes from the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. Decisions of substance, such as the understanding on central nervous system acting-chemicals, were adopted by the Conference. The adoption of the first ever biennial Programme and Budget for 2022–2023, with a zero-real growth-based principle, was also especially relevant. This will enable the Secretariat to conduct its mandated activities more sustainably and efficiently.
12. At the end of last year's Conference session in December, delegates had only just left the World Forum when the OPCW building was assaulted the following day.
13. During a demonstration outside the OPCW Headquarters, the building was violently stormed by more than 40 intruders, seeking media attention for their political claims. They damaged the premises and caused panic and anxiety among staff members. One of our security staff was slightly injured while trying to contain them. Although the secure area was breached, fortunately, confidential information from States Parties remained protected.
14. Through a Note issued on 6 December 2021 (S/2009/2021*), I informed States Parties immediately of this aggressive action, and of the initial measures we adopted. The Secretariat has already identified short-term steps to secure the building. We have internally earmarked EUR 810,000 from the Trust Fund for Cybersecurity and Physical Security to start reinforcing the identified weakest points in the building. Our security team has since conducted a full internal security risk assessment. The implementation of the measures identified in this assessment will require additional funding. You will be informed in due course and it will be up to you, States Parties, to decide on whether and how to finance the measures, if approved.
15. We have been in contact with the Dutch authorities. As Host Country, the Netherlands has an international legal responsibility to protect the premises around the building. In line with this responsibility, the Netherlands adopted additional surveillance measures in December, soon after the incident took place. Since then, in complement to the security assessment made by the Secretariat, the Dutch authorities have initiated their own security assessment. This work will be important to coordinate measures to be adopted inside and outside the building in the longer term. You will also have noticed a stronger police presence during this meeting outside the premises of the building. The Netherlands has been working to ensure an increased level of security, in line with the higher profile of the Organisation.

16. I noted the claims of the demonstrators in relation to the use of white phosphorous or white phosphorous-like elements. For several years, the Secretariat has been following and receiving claims and allegations of use of munitions containing white phosphorous, in different parts of the world. White phosphorus is an incendiary and smoke agent used in military operations. As such, it is not prohibited under the remit of the Chemical Weapons Convention, as the design of these weapons and their purpose are not dependent on its toxic properties, but on its thermic properties. Therefore, it falls under the purposes not prohibited under paragraph 9 of Article II of the Convention.
17. In case of misuse, white phosphorous may fall under the purview of various instruments regulating the use of these types of weapons. This includes the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which bans the use of incendiary weapons against civilian populations. Moreover, requests for a Secretariat engagement must come from States Parties, and must comply with the appropriate procedures and take place through the proper involvement of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties or Executive Council. For its part, the Secretariat will continue to monitor allegations.
18. I am pleased to inform you that the construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) continues to be on schedule and with controlled costs, despite the pandemic, rising inflation, and scarcity of construction materials. We have started to organise visits of groups of ambassadors to the construction site, which are limited for safety reasons. This way, you will all have the possibility to personally witness the evolution of the building, whose structure is already completed. A Note by the Secretariat (S/2026/2022, dated 17 February 2022) has been issued to provide details on the progress of the project.
19. To date, financial contributions and pledges of EUR 33.8 million have been received from 53 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I thank you for your continued support. Your contributions amount to the equivalent of half of the annual budget of the OPCW. This demonstrates the relevance you attribute to this project.
20. The ChemTech Centre will benefit the States Parties in five main areas:
 - (a) more space for capacity-building and international cooperation activities;
 - (b) enhanced laboratory capabilities;
 - (c) high-level training area for experts of Member States and Secretariat staff;
 - (d) a modern and secure equipment store that will allow users to calibrate, test, and train using adequate tools; and
 - (e) a venue for cooperation and outreach activities.
21. A first Note on possible programmatic activities to be carried out at the ChemTech Centre was circulated to all States Parties ahead of this Council (S/2034/2022, dated 1 March 2022). The outlined activities incorporate inputs provided by you, States Parties, over the past 18 months when I held informal consultations both at regional level and bilaterally. As the Secretariat informs States Parties in the Note, reflection within the Secretariat and discussions with States Parties will continue. The intention is to present you, later this year, with a set of more detailed projects proposed for implementation at the ChemTech Centre.

22. Some of the proposed new programmes are subject to extrabudgetary funding. Their implementation will depend on available financial, and human resources. For this purpose, I wish you to consider allowing the Secretariat to use part of the contributions for hiring experts to conduct certain dedicated activities. Having highly qualified staff in the Secretariat is key to the success of the Organisation and it will also be crucial to making full use of the ChemTech Centre.
23. In January, we reached the symbolic threshold of 99% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles verified as destroyed. The United States of America, the last possessor State, is expected to destroy its final stockpiles in 2023, as planned.
24. In the area of international cooperation and assistance, since the last session of the Council 36 capacity-building events have been conducted online, benefitting 1,679 participants from all geographical regions.
25. Turning to the Syrian chemical weapons dossier, an informal briefing, in two extensive identical sessions, was provided to States Parties on 23 February ahead of this session of the Council.
26. I have further shared with all States Parties the most recent letters exchanged between myself and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic, Faisal Mekdad.
27. On 24 and 31 January, the Secretariat issued two reports by the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) on use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which have been shared with States Parties. The first report (S/2017/2022*, dated 24 January 2022) concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that scheduled chemicals of the family of mustard agents were used in Marea on 1 September 2015, resulting in more than 50 injured persons. While information had been found regarding a similar incident two days later, on 3 September, the results of analysis of all available data obtained did not allow the FFM to establish whether or not chemicals were used as a weapon in this incident.
28. The second report (S/2020/2022, dated 31 January 2022) concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that a chlorine cylinder was used as a chemical weapon in the town of Kafr Zeita, on 1 October 2016, causing 20 persons to suffer from suffocation and breathing difficulties.
29. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is already looking into these reports. It will consider whether they provide sufficient material to launch investigations into identifying the perpetrators involved in these incidents. In the meantime, the IIT continues to make progress on its current investigations. Its next report will be issued in due course.
30. The Secretariat is planning the next rounds of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in the course of this year. They will be carried out pursuant to paragraph 11 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5, adopted on 11 November 2016. As States Parties were informed, during the third round of inspections at the Barzah site of the SSRC in November 2018, a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical was detected. The Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the Secretariat to close this issue. The last inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities took place at the end of last year. The report of these inspections will soon be finalised.

31. The Secretariat, through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), has continued its efforts to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic clarifies the shortcomings in its initial declaration. Since April 2021, the Secretariat has been reaching out to the Syrian National Authority to schedule the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the DAT in Damascus, which had initially been proposed to take place from 18 May to 1 June 2021. This deployment has not taken place yet, despite extensive efforts by the Secretariat.
32. This delay, of now 10 months, was initially caused by the absence of a response from the Syrian Arab Republic, and subsequently because of the repeated refusals of the Syrian National Authority to issue a visa to one DAT top expert. I recall that allowing full and unfettered access for personnel designated by the Secretariat has been requested of the Syrian Arab Republic through the decisions of this Council and by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).
33. I also wish to recall the decision adopted by the Conference at its April 2021 session entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (C-25/DEC.9, dated 21 April 2021) suspending certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Conference decided that these rights will be reinstated once I have reported that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed the requested measures adopted in the July 2020 Executive Council decision. To date, the Syrian Arab Republic has not completed any of these measures.
34. With a goal of restoring compliance in the shortest time possible, last June I invited Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal Mekdad to an in-person meeting, which is still in the preparatory stages. An initial agenda has been negotiated, and we are awaiting the Syrian Arab Republic’s position on the latest version submitted to it on 20 December 2021. Once the general agenda is agreed, engagement will continue on the details and annotations for each agenda point. Considering the tone of the letters I have recently received, which have been shared with you, without a change in approach and attitude from the Syrian side, it will be difficult to expect any positive outcome from such a high-level meeting.
35. For its part, the Secretariat continues to implement its mandates under the Convention, the decisions of the policy-making organs, and the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.
36. Regarding the Navalny case, I have no new developments to share with you at this stage from the Secretariat’s perspective. The Secretariat cannot deploy a technical assistance visit (TAV) to the Russian Federation if that country continues to request that the TAV be conducted in contravention of some of the basic rules and applicable procedures for these activities, such as guaranteeing the independence of the TAV team.
37. For their part, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, and Sweden, together with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of 45 States Parties, have initiated a series of requests for clarification under the procedure foreseen under Article IX of the Convention.
38. Referring to destruction-related activities, cooperation between the United States of America and the Secretariat during the intersessional period has ensured the uninterrupted verification at chemical weapons destruction facilities. These activities have been conducted based on modifications that ensure the health and safety of inspectors and personnel on site.

39. As of 28 February 2022, the Secretariat had verified the destruction of a total of 71,652 metric tonnes (MT), or 99.1%, of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. The destruction of remaining chemical weapons stockpiles is on track to achieve the goal of completing the destruction in 2023.
40. The Secretariat, with the Chairperson of the Council and with the United States of America, will evaluate how to conduct the Executive Council visit that has again been postponed because of the pandemic and is still planned to take place this year. In this respect, the United States circulated a Note ahead of this session inviting States Parties to an online event in March to continue informing States Parties about the destruction, as an additional transparency measure.
41. For 2022, 180 Article VI chemical industry inspections are mandated. This will be part of the phased return to the normal level of inspections. Border-related COVID-19 measures undertaken by States Parties to fight the effects of the pandemic are understandable. Yet, I am bound to report to this Council that this situation impacts our inspections plan, as the Secretariat will not be able to carry out all planned 180 inspections this year.
42. I started my opening statement with a word on the developments in Ukraine. This situation will also have direct impact on our activities. Ukraine has several declared chemical industry sites on its territory. Also, the closing of the Russian Federation's airspace for flights from Europe will mean longer and more expensive flights to reach Asia to deliver our activities, including inspections. The Secretariat has started assessing the possible impact of these measures and will keep States Parties informed.
43. Moving to abandoned chemical weapons (ACW), as of 28 February 2022 more than 60,000 of the 89,836 declared ACW on the territory of China have been reported as destroyed. Owing to existing COVID-19 measures, no ACW inspections have been carried out in China since the last session of the Council. The Secretariat continues to liaise with both China and Japan regarding the verification of ACW in China.
44. Since the last session of the Council, the Secretariat conducted four old chemical weapons (OCW) inspections in Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
45. As we draw closer to realising the disarmament goal of the Convention, we must increase our focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons use.
46. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism is an important platform for States Parties to engage on this agenda. The last meeting of the Group took place on 22 February. During that meeting, the Secretariat presented a Note on the status of the OPCW's contribution to global anti-terrorism efforts in 2021 (EC-99/DG.7, dated 14 February 2022) as well as on the contribution of the OPCW Africa Programme in countering chemical terrorism. I thank Ambassador Vusimuzi Madonsela of South Africa for his leadership as Chairperson of the Group.
47. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) will continue to assist the Organisation in keeping pace with scientific and technological change. The SAB's latest report (SAB-33/1, dated 18 November 2022), and my response to it (EC-99/DG.16, dated 2 March 2022), have been shared with all States Parties.

48. The Twelfth Session of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) was held from 8 to 10 February in an online modality. The Board's new composition reflects geographical diversity and gender balance: all geographical groups are represented and, for the first time in its history, seven out of the 15 Board members are female experts. This is a notable contribution to the achievements we celebrate today on International Women's Day.
49. I wish to congratulate Mr Shahab Ud Din and Dr Graciela Gonzalez for their election as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the ABEO for 2022. I look forward to the concrete outcomes of the Board's work. The report on the ABEO's operation from 2019 to 2021 (EC-99/DG.10, dated 17 February 2022) is being submitted to the Council at this session for its consideration.
50. Next month, we commence a period of major milestones for the Organisation. We start on 29 April, with the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention and the establishment of the OPCW. I encourage States Parties to observe the anniversary at national level in a way they deem suitable.
51. The Secretariat is planning an event comprising two seminars on the morning of 20 May to mark the occasion. The seminars will provide an opportunity to look back and to look forward. Detailed information will be shared with States Parties in due course. I have to express my sincere gratitude to the European Union for providing the financial support that will allow us to carry out such an important activity. The Secretariat will provide States Parties with information regarding the anniversary to enhance the visibility of this landmark occasion. This material can be easily used or adapted across your own official social media accounts and beyond.
52. In January 2023, we will commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Convention in Paris.
53. In May 2023, the OPCW will hold the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and set its strategic direction for the next five years. Following the decision of the Conference last December, this session of the Council will establish the Open-Ended Working Group on the Preparations for the Fifth Review Conference. I welcome the decision of the Eastern European Group to present Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia for the position of Chairperson of the Working Group.
54. Once the Open-Ended Working Group has been officially created, it will start its activities, through meetings and consultations, to hear views from all States Parties and relevant stakeholders. States Parties will be expected to produce position papers, or group papers, to guide the deliberations. While States Parties are the drivers of the review process, the Secretariat will support the Chairperson and all the preparations.
55. In the same year 2023, we expect to inaugurate the new ChemTech Centre. The future sustainability of the Organisation will depend on our ongoing adaptation. The ChemTech Centre will be the core tool for accelerating this process. The Centre will be crucial in increasing our ability to attract and to retain the necessary expertise to fulfil our mandates and to be well prepared to face the new threats.

56. The altered patterns of social and economic life imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to several global trends. A wave of employee resignations has affected virtually every sector. Like other public institutions, the OPCW has not been immune to these developments. In fact, at present, because of a higher-than-average rate of resignations in recent months, the OPCW has fewer filled fixed-term posts than at any time since 1997. This in turn has required a surge in recruitment activities, which has placed greater strain on the remaining staff.
57. This trend has underlined the importance of ensuring that the OPCW remains appropriately resourced, to continue to attract top talent, amid increasing competition from private and public sector organisations. To address this issue, the Secretariat is implementing several measures, including a regulatory framework for flexible working arrangements. This will more closely align us with similar organisations, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).
58. More broadly, we will sometimes need to retain the best performing and skilled staff members. This issue is directly related to recruitment and tenure.
59. Last year, important discussions on tenure took place within the framework of the facilitations on organisational matters. Ambassador Dupuy of Uruguay, who recently left, and Ambassador Neuhaus of Australia have been generously devoting their time and efforts to conducting these facilitations. I welcome the appointment of Ambassador Elizabeth Ward of Panama who will continue this task with Ambassador Neuhaus.
60. Beyond our human resources, the Organisation is also using its financial capabilities to the fullest. As of 1 January 2022, the OPCW began implementing its first-ever biennial budget. For the first time in over a decade, States Parties authorised an increase in regular budgetary financing for the OPCW on a zero-real growth basis. This will help to address years of erosion in the Organisation's increasingly tenuous financial position because of inflation. That decision was particularly prudent, as we start a year that is heavily influenced by historically high inflation rates, including in the OPCW's Host Country.
61. Although the current biennium budget has placed the OPCW on more solid budgetary footing, delayed payments of assessed contributions by States Parties remains a concern. It is as vital as ever that States Parties meet their financial obligations promptly and in full.
62. We approach the milestones I have mentioned taking stock of our achievements. At the same time, we are mindful of the significant tasks ahead in our common mission.
63. When tested, the international norm against the use of chemical weapons remains strong. This is because you, the States Parties, through the policy-making organs, continue to take action, as you deem fit, to strengthen and safeguard the Convention. And for its part, you can count on the Secretariat to continue to deliver all the mandates it receives from you, with conviction and loyalty to the Convention.