



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Seventh Session
28 November – 1 December 2022

C-27/DG.16
28 November 2022
Original: ENGLISH

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
AT ITS TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties.
2. I thank the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen of Norway, for his able stewardship of the Conference and of the deliberations of the General Committee throughout this past year. Ambassador Svendsen, you have skilfully and effectively facilitated the Conference's work programme with a clear vision and always in the best interests of the Organisation. I wish to express my gratitude for the interest, effort, and time you have devoted to your important task.
3. Ambassador Vusimuzi Madonsela of South Africa has been appointed as the new Chairperson of the Conference. My sincere congratulations, Ambassador. You can rest assured that we, at the Secretariat, will do our best to support you in your new task. As I know you well, I dare to say that the Conference has made a wise decision. I wish you great success in your new role.
4. I am pleased to note that the improvement of the COVID-19 situation enables us to meet in a less stringent setting, while taking account of the risks that still exist.
5. This session of the Conference convenes in a period of international tensions. It is the first meeting of the Conference since the start of the war in Ukraine, and the last one before its Fifth Review Conference,¹ in May next year. The situation in Ukraine has again increased the real threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. It has exacerbated existing tensions to a point at which unity of the international community, on common global challenges related to international security and peace, cannot be taken for granted. What once were constructive fora on disarmament and non-proliferation, related to the most dangerous weapons, now have become places for confrontation and disagreement. Despite this, the Organisation continues to deliver and adapt in order to tackle the new threats and risks.

¹ Review Conference = Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.



6. It is in this context, and within a period of 10 months, that three major treaties concerning weapons of mass destruction will have undergone their regular review cycles. Last August, the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons concluded without agreement on its final document. Today, as we meet here in The Hague, the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention has commenced in Geneva, Switzerland. This period will end with the Fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, next May. The work has begun in the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference, under the able leadership of Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia.
7. It is only with the active and constructive participation of all States Parties that the Organisation will be well placed to continue carrying out its mandate with success. Allow me to refer to the challenges and threats faced by the Organisation. To ensure that the Organisation remains fit for purpose, we must keep pace with scientific and technological developments. The global chemical industry is expanding in size and sophistication. This implies an increased risk of toxic substances falling into the wrong hands. This risk, together with the availability of new chemicals and new ways of delivery, could have catastrophic consequences.
8. Furthermore, with four countries still outside the Convention, there is a possibility that a possessor State will join in the future. The OPCW must maintain the knowledge and expertise it has acquired over the past 25 years to verify the destruction process of declared chemical weapons stockpiles.
9. Nearly 10 years of engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic exemplifies the magnitude of work and financial resources that the process of destruction and verification entails. It further demonstrates that, irrespective of the Secretariat's efforts, the full and effective implementation of the Convention can only be guaranteed through the active participation of States Parties.
10. States Parties have already demonstrated their commitment to ensuring the OPCW's readiness for the future through their support provided to the Centre for Chemistry and Technology—the ChemTech Centre. Despite the pandemic, global inflation, and supply chain constraints, the construction of the ChemTech Centre has gone ahead, respecting the budget and the timeline established at the origin.
11. The ChemTech Centre is set to be completed and handed over to the Secretariat in December, next month. In this last part of the project, the Secretariat has been working closely with the construction company to ensure that the building meets the highest quality standards. I am pleased to inform you that the inauguration ceremony of the Centre will be held on 12 May next year, in the presence of high-ranking authorities. A “save-the-date” announcement for the ceremony has been sent to the Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives of all States Parties. The official invitation, with details of the ceremony, will follow in due course.
12. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 34.25 million have been received from 54 countries, the European Union, and other donors. Thanks to the financial and political support of 54 States Parties, our generation of diplomats in The Hague will leave a very special legacy to future generations for the benefit of peace and security. Notes by the Secretariat providing updates on the progress of the

construction of the Centre have been shared with States Parties ahead of each session of the Executive Council, and ahead of this session of the Conference.

13. On 30 September, the Secretariat also issued a Note that summarises and outlines nine potential new programmes and activities to be implemented at the Centre (S/2102/2022). These activities and programmes are related to laboratory capabilities, training and capacity building for experts of the Organisation and of Member States, and to knowledge management and scientific collaboration. The full implementation of these programmes will require additional financial and human resources. Detailed information on each programme will be made available to States Parties willing to finance them. I invite States Parties to consider sponsoring the implementation of these new programmes and activities through voluntary contributions to a dedicated trust fund. The Secretariat will provide a briefing tomorrow on the recent progress in the construction of the Centre, as well as on the new activities. In addition to the capacities already mentioned, the Centre will provide the physical and technical infrastructure needed for increased business continuity capabilities for the Secretariat.
14. Alongside this effort, the physical security of the OPCW Headquarters remains a priority. This was highlighted by the security incident that took place one year ago, on 3 December 2021, when the OPCW Headquarters was violently stormed by more than 40 intruders, just one day after the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties concluded. The Secretariat has been adopting measures to increase security at the Headquarters, in consultation with the Host Country. An additional EUR 4.8 million is still required to implement the necessary physical security measures and upgrades. Some measures, comprising an improvement of the physical security systems, have already been completed. Others, namely the upgrade of the security critical areas, are expected to be finished in the first half of 2023. I thank the States Parties that have contributed to funding these improvements, and I expect to receive additional donations, which are very necessary. The increased number of demonstrations in The Hague outside the building requires additional working hours for the security officers at the Headquarters. This is stretching the Secretariat's resources for maintaining control and authority on our premises.
15. In addition to physical security, cybersecurity remains a serious concern. Phishing, malware, and network perimeter attacks have continued since the last session of the Conference. In the past four months, there have been approximately 30,000 attacks, targeting our internet-based services. Owing to voluntary contributions from several States Parties, which I thank sincerely, the Secretariat has been able to adopt new cybersecurity and protection measures. States Parties will continue to be informed of additional needs.
16. The Secretariat continues to deliver on all its mandates, thanks to the dedication and professionalism of its staff, despite the challenges I have outlined. To continue doing so, States Parties must ensure that the Secretariat receives adequate resources. Regarding the necessary means, draft decisions on two key items have been submitted to the Conference at this session for adoption.
17. The first is the Draft Revised Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2023, as recommended by the Executive Council, and submitted for adoption by the Conference. I seize this opportunity to thank Mr Jerzy Gierasimiuk of Poland and Mr Frank Groome of Ireland for their important roles facilitating the work conducted during the

intersessional period. The policy of biennial budgeting, adopted by the Conference, enables the Secretariat to deliver on its mandated activities more sustainably and effectively. Nonetheless, the European Central Bank inflation projections that were used in 2021 to prepare the biennial budget for 2022–2023 have substantially increased since the approval of that budget by the Conference. The budget of the Organisation for 2022 and 2023 included respectively a 1.3% and a 1.5% increase in some core costs. However, the European Central Bank's latest inflation figures are 8.3% for 2022 and 5.8% for 2023 respectively. In the Netherlands, the inflation rate rose from 2.7% in 2021 to a current rate of around 14%. In addition, the cost of utilities such as electricity, heating, and water, together with staff cost increases imposed by the United Nations system, have resulted in an increase of 40% over the budgeted costs in 2022.

18. For 2023, the Organisation has proposed no major changes to its programme but, instead, a set of adjustments to the budget. These adjustments are primarily focusing on two areas: to support the ongoing measures to enhance the physical security of the Headquarters building, and to accommodate significant projected increases in travel and utility costs.
19. Regarding the Secretariat's current financial situation, the External Auditor has confirmed that the OPCW recorded a cash surplus of EUR 4,545,010 in 2020. It is important to highlight that cash surpluses occur due to causes beyond the Secretariat's control. The 2020 surplus was primarily caused by some late assessed contribution payments by States Parties that cannot be spent during the same calendar year. The Secretariat has proposed the application of the cash surplus for 2020 and the remaining balance of the COVID-19 Variability Impact Fund to accommodate cost increases due to inflation. This would allow the Organisation to maintain the original level of assessed contributions for 2023. I wish to point out that, once again, cash inflows have continued to lag. The Secretariat is closely monitoring the Organisation's cash position. States Parties' late payments force the Secretariat to draw substantially from its Working Capital Fund before the end of the year to maintain liquidity and to keep the Organisation running. I recall that, in accordance with the applicable OPCW regulations, the payments of assessed contributions are due at the end of January each year.
20. Delivering on our mandate means we must ensure that we can continue to attract and retain a capable, committed, and diverse workforce. The Secretariat has been functioning with the lowest number of encumbered fixed-term posts in its history. On 30 April this year, the Secretariat had the lowest number of fixed-term staff in its history: only 393 filled posts out of 461 approved posts. This situation is not sustainable.
21. Over the past two years, the OPCW has not been immune to the global trend of increased staff turnover. This results in a significantly higher rate of annual staff turnover than the 14% initially contemplated in the tenure policy decisions adopted by the Conference in 1999 and 2003. Based on the rate of resignations in recent years and scheduled separations due to tenure, by the end of 2023, approximately 80% of tenured staff who were incumbent in January 2021 will have left. This represents a rate of turnover of 27% per year, almost double the rate expected by States Parties when they adopted the tenure policy. This is eroding the Secretariat's capability to maintain essential knowledge and skills, which is a high priority, as you are aware. The tenure policy and other governance issues are part of the discussions for the Fifth Review Conference in May next year. I hope that this serious matter will be considered comprehensively by all States Parties.

22. This issue is directly related to the second key decision before the Conference today, the decision on the rehiring of inspectors, which was also recommended for adoption by the Executive Council. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in fewer inspections in 2020, 2021, and 2022, and therefore fewer opportunities for inspectors recruited in this period to gain on-site experience. Such necessary experience would have enabled them to be promoted as Inspection Team Leaders and to train others. Additionally, in 2023 there will be a significant turnover of 35 inspectors who will tenure out, of whom 21 work at the level of Inspection Team Leader. Experienced inspectors will also be needed to deliver activities at the ChemTech Centre when it becomes operational in spring 2023. This decision on the rehiring of inspectors concerns the implementation of the core mandates of the Convention. It is now proposed for your consideration at this session, because it cannot wait until the outcomes of the discussions on tenure policy to be held during the Review Conference next May.
23. I shall now report on the activities undertaken by the Secretariat pursuant to its mandates under the Convention and the relevant decisions of the policy-making organs.
24. I will start with the Syrian Arab Republic chemical weapons dossier.
25. Through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Secretariat has continued its efforts to clarify the shortcomings noted in Syria's initial declaration. Attempts to organise the twenty-fifth round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority remained unsuccessful for a year. During the period between April 2021 and May 2022, the work of the Secretariat was met with Syria's failure to comply with its obligation to cooperate with the Organisation and to provide assistance to the Secretariat, as set out in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. The Syrian authorities continue to refuse to issue a visa to the lead technical expert of the DAT. The Syrian Arab Republic is expressly required by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and corresponding Executive Council decisions to accept and provide immediate and unfettered access to the personnel designated by the Secretariat of the OPCW.
26. The Secretariat held two meetings in The Hague with the Permanent Representation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW to emphasise the legal framework and Syria's obligations. As these attempts were also unsuccessful, the Secretariat proposed in May this year that, pending a change of attitude from the Syrian Arab Republic, shortcomings in its initial declaration would be addressed through the exchange of correspondence. This was already the case during the period between June 2016 and April 2019. Such exchanges bring fewer outcomes as compared to deployments to Syria. Activities carried out in Syria used to be comprised of exchanges with Syrian experts, visits to sites, sample taking, and interviews of persons of interest. Exchange of correspondence cannot allow for a wide range of activities and therefore has a much more limited scope.
27. Through its note verbale dated 14 September 2022, the Secretariat again provided the Syrian National Authority with the list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT since 2019 that could assist in resolving the current 20 outstanding issues. As the Syrian National Authority still has not shared any of these documents, the Secretariat proposed that a technical meeting be held on 15 and 16 November this year in Beirut, Lebanon. The purpose of the meeting was to identify

limited in-country activities in line with the plan of activities agreed in 2019, to replace the DAT consultations that cannot take place for the time being. The Syrian National Authority agreed to hold the meeting in Beirut on the proposed dates. Later, it placed a condition for its participation in this meeting, requesting the Secretariat to cover all costs related to transportation, accommodation, and daily allowance costs of the Syrian delegation in Beirut. The Secretariat recalled that such a situation had previously occurred in October 2021, when the Syrian National Authority agreed to participate in a proposed meeting in The Hague on condition that the Secretariat would bear similar costs. The Secretariat noted with regret that Syria this time again initially agreed to attend the meeting, only to later place financial conditions that it knew the Secretariat would not be in a position to meet. The Secretariat will continue to engage with the Syrian National Authority on ways to implement the mandate received under the Convention and from the policy-making organs.

28. On 15 November 2022, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the Secretariat a long document—17 pages in Arabic—entitled “The General National Document Regarding the Cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Between 2013 and 2022” and requested the Secretariat to circulate it to all States Parties. The Secretariat is currently translating and analysing the document and will circulate it in due course. At this stage, considering all the unresolved issues, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete.
29. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of an Executive Council decision adopted on 11 November 2016 (EC-83/DEC.5), the Secretariat conducted the ninth round of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre from 11 to 18 September 2022. The outcome of this round of inspections will be reported on in due course.
30. On 24 and 31 January 2022, the Secretariat issued two reports by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) on the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. 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 on 1 September 2015 in Marea, resulting in more than 50 injured persons.
31. 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 on 1 October 2016 in the town of Kafr Zeita, causing 20 persons to suffer from suffocation and breathing difficulties. The FFM is currently working on other allegations that have been assessed as credible. Since the last session of the Conference, the FFM has carried out three deployments related to allegations, to collect additional information that is now under review. States Parties were briefed on these matters on 23 February, 28 June, and 28 September 2022. The FFM is preparing for forthcoming deployments.
32. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is continuing its investigations into certain incidents for which the FFM had determined that use or likely use of chemical weapons on the territory of Syria occurred, and for which the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism had not reached a conclusion. The IIT will issue further reports in due course. Access to Syria still has not been granted to the members of the IIT team.

33. I recall the decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties in April 2021, entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (C-25/DEC.9, dated 21 April 2021), which suspended certain rights and privileges of that State Party. The Conference decided that these rights will be reinstated once I have reported that Syria has completed the requested measures adopted in the July 2020 Executive Council decision (EC-94/DEC.2, dated 9 July 2020). To date, Syria has not completed any of these measures.
34. As previously reported to the Conference, following my invitation extended in June 2021 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Syria to an in-person meeting in The Hague or any other mutually agreed location, both parties appointed focal points in charge of the preparations of this possible meeting. The Secretariat was awaiting a response from the Syrian focal point on the latest version of the agenda submitted to it on 20 December 2021. Instead, the Secretariat received a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic dated 21 September 2022, suggesting a meeting in Beirut to agree on the working agenda for the high-level meeting, disregarding the latest version of the proposed agenda sent nine months before. The Secretariat engaged again, through the agreed focal points, and requested clarifications from the Syrian side and stands ready, upon a response, to engage further.
35. As I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, the Secretariat has also been involved in dealing with the consequences of the war in Ukraine, in line with its mandate under the Convention. The Secretariat has been providing assistance and protection to Ukraine, upon its request, in several ways under Article X. Capacity-building courses have already been delivered, both online and in person, for Ukrainian first responders, to be better prepared against the threat of chemical weapons use, and in case of attacks targeting chemical industrial facilities. The Secretariat is also engaged in providing Ukrainian first responders with the necessary equipment for chemical detection, together with training activities and capacity-building courses providing instruction on how to use this equipment. Furthermore, the procurement of equipment for developing Ukrainian laboratory expertise followed by training courses is under consideration. The trust fund for the implementation of Article X, to which States Parties have contributed recently, has been and will be used for financing the costs of these procurements. Overall, already about EUR one million has been committed for this purpose.
36. I recall that the 193 States Parties to the Convention, including the Russian Federation and Ukraine, have solemnly and voluntarily committed, never under any circumstances, to develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, transfer or use chemical weapons. In addition, in April 2022, the Secretariat also provided advice to the United Nations Designated Official for Security and the United Nations Security Management Team in Ukraine on planning and preparing in case of an incident involving chemical warfare agents or toxic industrial chemicals. Moreover, an online training course was provided by the Secretariat to more than 1,200 United Nations staff members posted in Ukraine. The Secretariat, for its part, continues to closely monitor this serious situation and remains in contact with the Permanent Representations of the Russian Federation and Ukraine.
37. Beyond Ukraine, in the field of international cooperation and assistance, the easing of COVID-19-related travel restrictions allowed the Secretariat to resume in-person capacity-building activities in March, alongside the delivery of online capacity-building

support. Between November 2021 and November 2022, the Secretariat delivered 100 capacity-building events, using online, hybrid, and in-person modalities, benefiting some 3,264 participants from all geographical regions.

38. Turning now to destruction-related activities, as at 31 October 2022, a total of 71,876 metric tonnes, or 99.41%, of all declared chemical weapons had been destroyed under verification by the Secretariat. The United States of America plans to complete the destruction of the remainder of its declared stockpile by the proposed deadline of 2023.
39. As decided by the Conference last year, 180 Article VI chemical industry inspections were planned for 2022. Notwithstanding the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel, the Secretariat will have accomplished 90% of this number by the end of this year. This is a significant improvement compared to 2020 and 2021, when the impact of the pandemic meant that only one-third of all Article VI inspections could be accomplished. The outstanding inspections are due to the continued consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. I call on all States Parties that receive Article VI inspections to continue to make every effort to meet their obligations under the Convention, while taking into account the lingering impacts of the pandemic.
40. Regarding chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China, as at 31 August 2022, a total of 89,836 items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) had been recovered, of which 60,170 had been destroyed. The destruction of the chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China is scheduled to continue, based on the destruction plan beyond the year 2022, which was considered and adopted at the Council's last session.
41. On 15 September 2022, China and Japan hosted a virtual Executive Council visit to the Haerbaling ACW recovery, storage, and destruction facility. The delegation was briefed on the progress of ACW destruction, and the efforts made by both China and Japan. From 31 October to 4 November 2022, a remote inspection of the Haerbaling ACW storage and destruction facilities was conducted by the Secretariat. This was the first of its kind since the outbreak of COVID-19. China and Japan continue to maintain their communication regarding the next phase of the programme of work. The Secretariat remains in close contact with China and Japan regarding the latest developments in this respect.
42. Since the last session of the Conference, old chemical weapons inspections have been conducted at sites in Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.
43. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism provides an essential platform for all States Parties to address the subject of terrorism. Under the chairmanship of Ambassador Madonsela of South Africa, the Working Group has met three times this year and has further been engaging with the process for preparing the Fifth Review Conference.
44. The work of the Scientific Advisory Board—the SAB—is central to keeping abreast of rapid advances in science and technology. The SAB held three sessions this year, with a focus on its science and technology review process for the 2023 Review Conference. The Board's Temporary Working Group on the Analysis of Biotoxins held three meetings in 2022 and aims to finalise its report and recommendations in January next year.

45. The activities of the Advisory Body on Education and Outreach—the ABEO—in supporting the production of interactive resources are an important component of the Organisation’s efforts in raising awareness of the OPCW and its mission. The ABEO held two sessions in The Hague this year, with a continued focus on e-learning.
46. The use of chemical weapons over the past 10 years in Iraq, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reinforces the importance of creating awareness of the norm against their use.
47. In a few minutes, we will announce this year’s winners of the OPCW-The Hague Award, presented by the OPCW and the Municipality of The Hague. I invite all delegates to the ceremony, which will take place at 12:30 here in the King Willem-Alexander Theater.
48. On Wednesday at 9:45, we will observe the annual Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare. In the current global context, this observance is a profound reminder that the norm must continue to be defended.
49. As every year, I must make a special mention to the victims, remembering them and their families. At this solemn moment of the opening session of the Conference I would like to underline that they will never be forgotten and they will always be in our thoughts. The International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons was created for that purpose, together with a voluntary trust fund.
50. It is a crucial moment for you, States Parties, to renew your commitment to the Convention, through your actions and decisions at this session, which will allow us to move forward. In times of threat to peace and international security, inaction is not an option, neither is indifference, because each State Party has a responsibility towards the international community. You can count on the dedication, independence, and expertise of all Secretariat staff members to support you in this shared endeavour.

- - - 0 - - -