



102nd Session  
14 – 17 March 2023

EC-102/DG.18  
14 March 2023  
Original: ENGLISH

### **OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 102ND SESSION**

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the 102nd Session of the Executive Council.
2. I begin by offering my heartfelt sympathies to the families of the victims of the disastrous earthquake that struck the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye on 6 February 2023.
3. This session is the last meeting of the policy-making organs before the Fifth Review Conference. It is also the first in this much-anticipated milestone year. Indeed, in 1993, 30 years ago, the Chemical Weapons Convention was opened for signature in Paris. Four years later, in April 1997, it became legally binding.
4. Since that time, the Organisation has worked towards the elimination of the threat of use of chemical weapons. For its part, the Technical Secretariat has delivered on all of its mandates, while responding to emerging crises on multiple fronts.
5. Over the past decade, the world has witnessed the use of chemical weapons in Iraq, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Secretariat has provided technical assistance to Germany and to the United Kingdom, at their request, to confirm the identity of the chemical warfare agents involved in poisoning cases. And in Syria, a decade after the OPCW commenced its activities there, our work remains far from complete.
6. The date of 24 February marked a year since the start of the war in Ukraine, a year in which the Secretariat has continued to monitor the situation. At Ukraine's request, the Secretariat has responded through its assistance and protection programmes, using voluntary contributions from States Parties for that purpose.
7. In the past few years, the Secretariat has continued to respond to unforeseen situations as they emerge. It has done so while maintaining routine operations. This has stretched the Secretariat's human and financial resources to the limit, despite the efficiency measures that have been put in place and the voluntary contributions received from some States Parties.
8. Taking into account the new, different challenges the Secretariat has to face, including the rapid evolutions in science and technology, it is crucial to develop the Organisation's capacity to guarantee that it remains fit for delivering. This includes maintaining adequate and stable resources for the Secretariat. It also implies the need for the Secretariat to receive from the States Parties clear strategic guidance for the next few years.



9. The Fifth Review Conference offers a unique opportunity for this purpose. I seize this opportunity to commend delegations for their constructive and collective engagement in the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference. I also wish to convey appreciation to the Chairperson of the Working Group, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, for his dedicated leadership, efforts, and generosity.
10. Last month, the Secretariat issued a comprehensive Note on the operation of the Convention since the Fourth Review Conference (WGRC-5/S/1 RC-5/S/1, dated 28 February 2023). This Note has been carefully prepared to assist delegations in the preparation of the Review Conference, which is rapidly approaching as it will take place from 15 to 19 May.
11. This Review Conference intersects with the Organisation's adaptation from focusing mainly on destruction, to concentrating mainly on prevention, including deterrence. Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons entails updating and strengthening the industry verification regime, following and accompanying progress in science and technology, closing gaps in national implementation, enhancing international cooperation, including assistance and protection, and augmenting efforts with respect to countering chemical terrorism. In addition, and as long as there are still States not Party to the Convention, the Secretariat must maintain the expertise to receive new possessor States, should any decide to join. Preserving and building on the Secretariat's expertise, knowledge, and skills requires financial and human resources, as well as the ability to deploy them. Again, the Fifth Review Conference will provide States Parties with a unique opportunity to chart the Organisation's course for the coming years.
12. The construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) was completed last December. I am pleased to inform the Council that, following the testing and commissioning of the building, the Secretariat formally accepted it on 27 January 2023.
13. A Note by the Secretariat providing updates on the ChemTech Centre's construction was shared with States Parties last month (S/2136/2023, dated 17 February 2023). A briefing on the status of the Centre will take place later today.
14. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 34.6 million have been received from 56 countries, the European Union, and other donors. I sincerely thank all contributors for your generous support, which demonstrates a vision for the future of the Organisation.
15. The inauguration ceremony of the ChemTech Centre will be held on 12 May in the presence of high-level dignitaries. A "save-the-date" for the ceremony as well as an official invitation have already been sent to the Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives of all States Parties. Details regarding the ceremony will follow in due course. I encourage all delegations to promote high-level representation from your capitals to attend the ceremony.
16. Little by little, we will develop the high potential of the ChemTech Centre through the activities approved in the Programme and Budget and additional activities focused on reinforcing them.

17. States Parties will recall that the Secretariat shared a Note identifying some new programmes and activities anticipated to be implemented at the ChemTech Centre (S/2102/2022, dated 30 September 2022). All of these are focused on enhancing the activities approved in the 2022–2023 Programme and Budget of the Organisation and relate to the following areas:
  - (a) augmenting laboratory analytical capabilities;
  - (b) training of Secretariat and State Party experts;
  - (c) capacity-building for States Parties;
  - (d) knowledge management; and
  - (e) scientific collaboration.
18. More specifically, from the day of the inauguration of the ChemTech Centre, the Secretariat will prioritise: the expansion of its capability to analyse biotoxins; the creation in the Inspectorate of a team of inspectors in charge of equipment evaluation and tests, to further improve inspectors' equipment for any type of mission; and the enhancement of skills and expertise for customs authorities, with a workshop that will make full use of the expanded facilities of the Centre. I invite States Parties interested in supporting one or more of these activities to reach out to the Secretariat to engage on these projects. The ChemTech Centre is an enhanced version of the Secretariat's Laboratory and Equipment Store facilities in Rijswijk, which will be decommissioned once operations begin at the Centre. As part of the Secretariat, the ChemTech Centre will enable us to do more, and better, in line with our previous activities in view of implementation of the Convention. The Centre today is a reality, and a force multiplier for the Organisation, with a strong component devoted to improving international cooperation programmes, both in number and in substance.
19. I will now report on the activities undertaken by the Secretariat in line with the mandates it has received.
20. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues to make progress on its investigations to identify the perpetrators, in connection with several incidents of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic reported by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). On 27 January the IIT published its third report, issued by the Secretariat as document S/2125/2023. The Coordinator of the IIT and I briefed States Parties about this report on 2 February, and on 7 February we provided a virtual briefing on it to the United Nations Security Council. The third report of the IIT sets out the findings of the investigations of the chemical weapons incident that took place on 7 April 2018 in Douma, the Syrian Arab Republic. On the basis of all the information obtained and analysed, the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that between 19:10 and 19:40 (UTC+3), on 7 April 2018, during a major military offensive aimed at regaining control of the city of Douma, at least one Mi-8/17 helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Dumayr airbase and operating under the control of the Tiger Forces, dropped two yellow cylinders which hit two residential buildings in a central area of the city. Forty-three named individuals were killed, and dozens more were affected. As required by the decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties at its Fourth Special Session on 27 June 2018, the Secretariat provided the report of the IIT investigations to the Executive Council and to the United Nations Secretary-General for

their consideration. As also required by the same decision, the Secretariat is preserving and sharing information with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) established by the United Nations General Assembly through its resolution 71/248 (2016).

21. Through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Secretariat has continued its efforts to clarify the shortcomings noted in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration. As I previously informed the Council, since April 2021 the Secretariat's attempts to organise the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority have remained unsuccessful. The Syrian National Authority has continued to refuse to issue an entry visa to the lead technical expert from the DAT. The Syrian Arab Republic has also conditioned a possible limited round of consultations in Beirut, Lebanon to the exclusion from the meetings of the same DAT expert, and to the Secretariat paying for travel and accommodation expenses of the Syrian delegation. In May 2022, the Secretariat proposed to the Syrian Arab Republic that shortcomings in its initial declaration be addressed through the submission of pending declarations and other documents. A similar situation had already occurred between June 2016 and April 2019, when the Syrian lack of engagement was reported by my predecessor. I stress again that such an exchange yields fewer outcomes compared to the DAT's full rounds of consultations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Accordingly, through a note verbale dated 14 September 2022, the Secretariat provided the Syrian Arab Republic with a list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT, and agreed by the Syrian National Authority, since 2019. The Secretariat further requested the Syrian side to expeditiously submit all pending declarations and documents, as well as declarations required under Executive Council decisions EC-M-33/DEC.1 (dated 27 September 2013), EC-94/DEC.2 (dated 9 July 2020), and Conference of the States Parties decision C-25/DEC.9 (dated 21 April 2021). While the Secretariat still had not received any of the documents requested, in a further attempt to implement its mandate it deployed a reduced team, composed of several members of the DAT, to conduct limited in-country activities in the Syrian Arab Republic from 17 to 22 January 2023. During this deployment, the reduced team conducted three site visits and one interview. It also shared the results of the analysis of samples that had been collected in April 2019. The details of this visit were provided to you during the Secretariat's briefing on 8 March, and in my Note reporting on the work of the DAT (EC-102/HP/DG.1, dated 6 March 2023), which was made available to you last week. I wish to restate that, under the Convention and pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and the relevant decisions of the OPCW policy-making organs, the Syrian Arab Republic has an obligation to allow full and unfettered access to personnel designated by the OPCW.
22. At the last session of the Council, I informed you that, pursuant to paragraph 11 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5 adopted on 11 November 2016, the Secretariat conducted the ninth round of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) from 11 to 18 September 2022. The final inspection report was shared with the Syrian Arab Republic on 2 March 2023. The Secretariat is in the process of planning the next inspections of the SSRC, and the Council will be informed about these activities in due course.
23. The FFM is currently working on allegations that have been assessed as credible. Since the last session of the Council, it has carried out three deployments related to such allegations in order to collect additional information that is now under review. States Parties were briefed on these matters on 8 March 2023. The FFM is preparing for forthcoming deployments, subject to the conditions in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake. It will issue additional reports in due course.

24. On 8 February 2023, the Syrian National Authority submitted a compact disc containing pictures of damage to a site which, according to it, had housed the two cylinders used in the chlorine chemical attack that took place in Douma in April 2018. According to the Syrian National Authority, this damage resulted from a reported conventional air strike that had occurred on 8 June 2021. These photos show damage to a building but do not show any traces of the cylinders. The Secretariat also noted that the compact disc did not provide any information explaining the unauthorised relocation of the two cylinders to the site alleged to have been destroyed by the air strikes. This location is 60 kilometres from the site where the Secretariat had requested that the Syrian Arab Republic keep the cylinders, a request to which the Syrian Arab Republic had agreed. In a note verbale dated 15 July 2021, the Secretariat requested the Syrian National Authority to provide the aforementioned information. The Secretariat is still waiting to receive it.
25. As I mentioned earlier, the Secretariat has been conducting activities under the Convention related to assistance and protection for Ukraine, upon its request, as a consequence of the war there. The Secretariat has provided several training courses to Ukrainian first responders to strengthen preparedness against the use of chemical weapons, particularly in case of attacks targeting industrial facilities. The Secretariat is also providing chemical detection equipment and associated training to Ukrainian first responders. Additionally, the procurement of equipment and delivery of training to develop Ukrainian laboratory expertise is under consideration. The trust fund for the implementation of Article X, to which States Parties have contributed recently, will need further funding to continue financing these kinds of operations. To date, the Secretariat has committed EUR 1.35 million in voluntary contributions to assist Ukraine.
26. The Secretariat, through the International Cooperation and Assistance Division, has continued to deliver in-person and online capacity-building activities in several Member States. Since the last session of the Council, 35 events of this kind, including nine online events, have been conducted, benefitting 984 participants from Member States from all geographical regions. Among all of these activities, I wish to highlight my visit to Australia in October last year. In Brisbane, I opened and participated in a well-attended forum on enhancing the implementation of the Convention in the Pacific Island States. In November, a training for first responders from African States Parties on response to incidents involving chemical warfare agents and/or toxic industrial chemicals was organised by the Secretariat in Murcia, Spain. Also in November, the Secretariat and Morocco jointly organised, in Rabat, a workshop for States Parties in Africa on chemical incident preparedness for hospitals. In December, a training course on conducting sampling and analysis in highly contaminated environments was jointly organised by the Secretariat and Algeria for African States Parties. Last month, the Secretariat organised a pre-hospital care course for GRULAC States Parties on incidents involving toxic chemicals. The course was delivered in Mexico by a team of instructors provided by the Mexican Government. These are only a handful of the 35 activities I just mentioned, which have taken place since this Council last met in October. They illustrate that the Secretariat continues to bring the States Parties expertise related to national implementation of the Convention, the preparedness of first responders in cases of use of chemical weapons, and the capacity to analyse chemicals in such cases. With the start of operations at the ChemTech Centre, we will be able to increase the number and effectiveness of activities, in line with what has been done so far. I seize this opportunity to warmly welcome our new Director of International Cooperation and Assistance, Ms Kazumi Ikeda-Larhed.

27. Destruction-related activities continued in the United States of America. The Secretariat has maintained its verification activities at chemical weapons destruction facilities in Blue Grass, Kentucky, and Pueblo, Colorado. As at 28 February 2023, the Secretariat had verified the destruction by the United States of 27,519 MT, or 99.1%, of its Category 1 chemical weapons stockpile. The United States plans to complete the destruction of the remaining stockpile by September 2023.
28. In 2022 the Secretariat completed 160 chemical industry inspections, twice the number conducted in 2021. This was achieved thanks to many States Parties continuing to embrace sequential inspections. It allowed for longer missions, an approach first implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 34 sequential inspections were conducted, saving the Secretariat approximately EUR 700,000 in travel costs. As was decided by the Conference last year, 200 chemical industry inspections have been planned for 2023. Of the 39 States Parties scheduled to receive inspections in 2023, seven have already completed their entire Article VI chemical industry inspection plans. The Secretariat encourages States Parties to be flexible in regard to sequential inspections so that all Article VI inspections planned for 2023 can be completed. Sequential inspections will assist in making the best use of limited Secretariat resources and further reduce the burden on National Authorities.
29. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan at various sites in China. As at 28 February 2023, a total of 65,894 of the 97,539 declared items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) on the territory of China have been reported by Japan and verified by the Secretariat as already destroyed. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, no physical ACW inspections have been carried out in China since November 2019. In October 2022, an inspection of the Haerbaling ACW storage and destruction facility was conducted remotely. On 8 February 2023, the thirty-seventh trilateral meeting between China, Japan, and the Secretariat was held via videoconference. It was agreed, in principle, to resume on-site ACW inspections in China in 2023.
30. Regarding old chemical weapons (OCW), since the last session of the Council the Secretariat has conducted two OCW inspections, one in France and one in Belgium. Further OCW inspections are planned for later this year.
31. With respect to the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD), lists of newly validated data on scheduled and non-scheduled chemicals have been compiled for approval by the Council at this session.
32. During the intersessional period, the work of the subsidiary and other bodies has also continued.
33. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, chaired by Ambassador Vusimuzi Madonsela of South Africa, met on 6 March. The Secretariat delivered a presentation at the meeting on science and technology considerations in countering chemical terrorism, including the role and activities of the Scientific Advisory Board. The Working Group discussed a proposal to hold a table-top exercise, inter alia, to connect national entities that deal with counterterrorism and to help identify gaps and challenges in areas such as capacity building for prevention, response, and investigation. This would build on the Working Group's activities in 2022 to inform the preparatory process for the Fifth Review Conference, as outlined by the Working Group's Chairperson in his report to the last session of the Council (EC-101/WP.2, dated 5 October 2022).

34. The report of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) on developments in science and technology to the Fifth Review Conference, as well as my response to that report, were recently issued to all States Parties (respectively RC-5/DG.1 and RC-5/DG.2, both dated 22 February 2023).
35. I should emphasise the great significance of the SAB's work. Scientific research and development continue to be complex, dynamic, and increasingly transdisciplinary. The SAB monitors these scientific and technical developments, with the aim of understanding the potential risks they pose, as well as the opportunities they may afford the Organisation, for a better implementation of the Convention.
36. Progress in science and technology represent a challenge for us, yet, at the same time, may assist us in strengthening the verification regime, streamlining or accelerating relevant research activities, increasing the safety personnel and, finally, filling critical knowledge gaps.
37. I highly encourage all States Parties to read and make use of the Scientific Advisory Board's report and my response to it. The reports will be extremely useful in the discussions in the lead up to the Fifth Review Conference. You can count on the Secretariat in the coming years to use the high potential of the ChemTech Centre to further develop its capacities in scientific and technical research and knowledge for the benefit of States Parties.
38. The Advisory Board on Education and Outreach met for its Fourteenth Session from 7 to 9 February 2023 in The Hague. Education and outreach will play an increasingly important role in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and in fostering engagement with future generations on disarmament and non-proliferation-related issues.
39. Despite all of the difficulties I have mentioned above, the Secretariat must continue to deliver.
40. Attracting and retaining the best possible experts is crucial. This task has become really very challenging. This is a result of the persistent high rate of voluntary separations experienced by many organisations globally, and to the mandated separations caused by the OPCW's tenure policy. This means that we are constantly losing knowledge and expertise.
41. In February 2023, we reached a new all-time low in the number of occupied fixed-term positions, with 387 out of 464 approved posts filled. Such a situation is not sustainable for any organisation, not least a knowledge-based one such as the OPCW. The OPCW must benefit from a "fit-for-future" workforce, striking the right balance between regular injections of new talent and better leveraging the skills, experience, and knowledge of current and former staff. The costs of excessive turnover resulting from the tenure policy are not related solely to people and knowledge. The financial costs related to the constant recruitment processes and the relocation of staff are also significant. For example, in 2022 the direct financial costs associated with professional staff leaving and joining, such as installation, shipments, and travel, were approximately EUR 2.3 million. The costs incurred by the Organisation in relation to excessive recruitments, onboarding, and training should be reduced. Flexibility on tenure will provide significant means to absorb the cost increases that I have mentioned, lessening the financial burden on States Parties. The tenure policy is being addressed in the facilitations of the Open-Ended Working Group, and I hope that progress will be made in the context of the Fifth Review Conference.

42. A geographically diverse and gender-balanced workforce is crucial to our effectiveness. Different perspectives nurture the innovation we need as an Organisation. Therefore, continued progress on both geographical diversity and gender balance remains a top priority. Allow me to share two concrete examples that demonstrate how our efforts have produced results. Between 2018 and 2022, the share of women at the senior management level increased from 10 to 45%. On geographical diversity, in January 2023 the share of GRULAC nationals, the group with the lowest number of staff members in the Professional category, was the highest it has been in 17 years.
43. Another challenge is the impact of the exceptionally high level of inflation experienced recently. This is particularly relevant as the Secretariat has embarked on the process of developing its next biennial Programme and Budget, which will cover 2024 and 2025. The draft Programme and Budget is expected to be published at the end of June for review by States Parties. The first biennial budget was prepared in 2021 when the rate of inflation was markedly lower than it is now.
44. The International Civil Service Commission—which sets the salary levels of the United Nations and the OPCW—substantially raised salaries and related allowances in 2022. It did so again in February 2023, and is likely to make further increases later this year. These costs are imposed on the Organisation and, if not compensated, will limit its capacity to deliver.
45. Furthermore, the costs of travel as well as our rental and utilities costs have also increased significantly.
46. In 2022, the Secretariat accommodated these increases through the allocation of savings from prior years and by reserving a percentage of each division's budget. The same is being done in 2023. These measures ensure that the Organisation lives within its means. Still, the OPCW will need appropriate resources in the coming years to effectively perform its role in an increasingly demanding security environment.
47. The proposition is not, however, to ask States Parties to pay more for the same. On the contrary, it is to request the resources necessary to deliver world-class solutions to new and emerging challenges to the Convention, including through the development of the high potential offered by the ChemTech Centre. Therefore, while the Organisation will limit its funding requirements, as far as possible, an increase in the biennial budget for 2024–2025 is inevitable. When tackling this problem, we must keep in mind that the total budget of the OPCW is very modest compared with other similar international organisations.
48. In closing, since the last Review Conference the world has continued to witness fundamental changes. The threats to peace and international security have intensified. Commitment to the global disarmament architecture is in decline. Scientific and technological progress has contributed immensely to the welfare and prosperity of humankind, but the world is faced with the many risks associated with the misuse of such progress. Chemical weapons have been used by States and non-State actors alike, and complacency is not an option. In this environment, your role as members of the Executive Council is now more important than ever.