



NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

UPDATE ON THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT'S READINESS TO CONDUCT A CHALLENGE INSPECTION OR AN INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE

Introduction

1. The First Review Conference¹ requested the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) to “continue maintaining a high standard of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, to keep the Council informed about its readiness, and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection” (paragraph 7.91 of RC-1/5, dated 9 May 2003).
2. The Second Review Conference reiterated this request to the Secretariat (paragraph 9.90 of RC-2/4, dated 18 April 2008).
3. The First Review Conference also “stressed the importance of investigations of alleged use or threat of use of chemical weapons. For such situations, the OPCW must have the capacity, and be ready at all times, to investigate the need for follow-on action by the OPCW and by individual Member States” (paragraph 7.100 of RC-1/5). The Second Review Conference reiterated this concern (paragraph 9.105 of RC-2/4).
4. The Third Review Conference made two requests to the Secretariat with respect to the conduct of a challenge inspection (CI) or an investigation of alleged use (IAU) (paragraph 9.111 of RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013). The first was that the Secretariat continue to improve the standard of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”). The second was to keep the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) informed about its readiness and to report any problems that may arise in relation to maintaining the necessary level of readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU.
5. The Secretariat has previously submitted to the Council several updates on its readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU. This Note concentrates on the activities the Secretariat has undertaken since the last update (EC-100/DG.10, dated 16 June 2022), and highlights issues that still require further consideration and attention by States Parties and by the Secretariat.

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



The Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell, the Mission Support Group, and the Situation Centre

6. Since 2016, the Secretariat has assigned a cadre of inspectors to the Capacity-Building and Contingency-Planning Cell (CBCP) to plan, coordinate, and implement trainings and exercises with the purpose of ensuring the Secretariat's readiness to respond to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, to provide assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons, and to lead the conduct of non-routine missions, including CIs and IAUs, in accordance with Articles IX and X of the Convention or the mandate of the Council.
7. To properly manage the command-and-control elements of a CI, an IAU, or other non-routine mission, the Secretariat continues to rely on the concept of a Mission Support Group (MSG), which has been created specifically for each non-routine deployment and provides support to deployed teams.
8. To actively manage ongoing CI and IAU missions, the Situation Centre (SITCEN) provides 24-hour, real-time mission support to deployed teams. This includes the capability to provide an initial analysis of the alleged use of chemical weapons, a comprehensive common operating picture, secure and reliable communications, and up-to-date information/analysis to facilitate senior management decision-making.

Operational procedures and training of inspectors

9. Inspectorate training programmes since the last reporting period and up to the cut-off date of 31 May 2023 continued to maintain the mandatory requirements under the Quality Management System for the conduct of inspection activities and for the preparation of inspectors and inspection team leaders to perform inspection duties for CIs and IAUs.
10. As reported previously, the Secretariat continues to regularly update its existing training programmes and to develop and implement new ones aimed at strengthening and adapting capabilities to conduct non-routine missions such as CIs and IAUs.
11. Throughout the reporting period, the CBCP coordinated and/or delivered various trainings, including initial inspector training, certifications, recertifications, and general and specialised trainings. The training programme involved relevant Secretariat staff members, including from the Inspectorate.
12. Listed below are relevant trainings pertaining to the conduct of CIs, IAUs and other non-routine missions:
 - (a) Initial inspector training: Thirteen new inspectors (Group U) completed all mandatory training, cross-trainings, and certifications to fulfil the required OPCW standards; this includes gaining the fundamental knowledge required to conduct both routine and non-routine missions, including IAUs and CIs.
 - (b) Toxic chemical training (TCT): TCT is mandatory for inspectors and select Secretariat staff who may be exposed to chemical warfare agent. The training provides the practical skills to safely encounter, detect, and understand the physical properties of chemical warfare agents. Two iterations of TCT were organised and

conducted: the first in Slovakia for the 13 Group U inspectors in October 2022 and a second refresher TCT in Serbia in March 2023 for 20 Secretariat staff, including 11 inspectors.

- (c) Schedule 1 chemistry: The training provides theoretical knowledge about the chemistry of Schedule 1 chemicals, including their physical and chemical properties, synthesis routes, decontamination, toxicological properties, and degradation pathways. A total of 15 inspectors were either certified or recertified during this mandatory course in October 2022 in The Hague.
- (d) Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE): This training is a requirement of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security to conduct missions in high-risk environments. Hostile Environment Awareness Training, provided and sponsored by Germany, and augmented by the Secretariat's certified SSAFE trainers, provided 17 Secretariat staff, including 12 inspectors with all of the necessary modules to obtain SSAFE certification in February 2023.

Specialised training and exercises

- 13. Specialised training is aimed at enhancing inspectors' individual skills following initial inspector training. These trainings are coordinated and organised internally by the CBCP but can also be delivered by external providers and tailored to OPCW needs. Exercises are organised and conducted to provide a holistic understanding of roles and responsibilities within a multidisciplinary team environment and to evaluate organic capabilities and overall preparedness.
- 14. Listed below are the relevant specialised trainings and exercises conducted during the reporting period:
 - (a) Advanced TCT: This training is comprised of complex scenarios where proper reconnaissance, sampling, and chain of custody techniques are practiced and evaluated in a live-agent environment. Two iterations took place in Slovakia: for eight inspectors in June 2022 and for 20 Secretariat staff, including two inspectors in October 2022.
 - (b) Offshore medic course and pre-hospital trauma life support: The training provides Advanced Health and Safety Specialist (AHSS) inspectors with the skills to provide care in remote environments. Two inspectors participated in this specialised training in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in June 2022.
 - (c) OPCW non-destructive testing level 1 and refresher training: Specialised ultrasound and radiographic theoretical and practical trainings were conducted at the Equipment Store in Rijswijk in September and November 2022 for the benefit of Chemical Weapons Munitions Specialist (CWMS) inspectors. Furthermore, inspectors received OPCW certification following the conduct of non-destructive evaluation practical exercises at Poelkapelle, Belgium in June and December 2022.

- (d) Non-destructive testing level 2: Advanced ultrasound and radiographic theoretical and practical training and certification, provided by MME Group, was conducted for 10 CWMS inspectors at the Equipment Store in Rijswijk in September 2022.
- (e) OPCW investigative team leader training: This training, held at the Institute for International Criminal Investigations (IICI) in the Netherlands in November 2022, was tailored to OPCW requirements and focused on leadership, communication, decision making, and mission planning skills during the conduct of non-routine missions. Eleven Secretariat staff members, including one inspector, took part.
- (f) OPCW investigative interview skills training: This training, held at the IICI in the Netherlands, was tailored to OPCW requirements and aimed at enhancing interview skills. It consisted of a blend of theory and role-playing exercises during the conduct of non-routine missions. Eight Secretariat staff and one inspector took part in this training in November 2022.
- (g) Analytical chemistry inspector certification: This training deals with chemical analysis and reporting techniques, field-based chemical detection and identification, sampling techniques, sample preparation, the scientific principles and practical application of gas chromatography and mass spectrometry, and data analysis. The training was provided to two inspectors at the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store in Rijswijk in January 2023. Additionally, during the reporting period, four analytical chemist inspectors completed their recertification to maintain operational status.
- (h) OPCW open-source investigation training: The training, held at the IICI in the Netherlands, was tailored to OPCW requirements and focused on the professional standards and guidelines for digital investigations as well as the tools and techniques required for the safe, ethical, and effective gathering of online information. Nine Secretariat staff and four inspectors took part in this training in February 2023.
- (i) Self-contained breathing apparatus advanced operator: This training involved qualifying inspectors conducting operations in personal protective equipment up to OPCW standard protective clothing level 8. Six inspectors took part in this CBCP-led activity at the OCPW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) in April 2023.
- (j) Command and control training: This training, provided and sponsored by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consisted of operational-level non-routine mission planning and execution via a variety of theoretical and practical exercises. Nine inspectors took part in the training at the United Kingdom Police National CBRN Centre in Ryton on Dunsmore in May 2023.
- (k) Assistance coordination and assessment team training: The training, provided and sponsored by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consisted of table-top exercises involving the provision of coordination and assistance to States Parties that require support under Article X of the Convention. Twelve Secretariat staff, including five inspectors, took part in the training in The Hague in May 2023.

15. The Secretariat greatly appreciates the support of Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in supporting training opportunities in 2022 and 2023.

Equipment and laboratories

16. Since last year's report (EC-100/DG.10), the Secretariat has kept States Parties informed of the procurement of several items of approved inspection equipment that conform to the operational requirements and technical specifications approved by the Conference of the States Parties. The Secretariat informed the States Parties of the newly procured items of approved equipment through Notes S/2091/2022 (dated 25 August 2022), S/2109/2022 (dated 9 November 2022), and S/2166/2023 (dated 25 April 2023).
17. The OPCW Technology and Training Hub has been established at the ChemTech Centre following the relocation of the Equipment Store facility previously located in Rijswijk, the Netherlands. The new facility greatly improves the ability of the Secretariat to maintain the necessary supplies and equipment and to support a CI or IAU inspection team deployment within the time frames specified in the Convention, or to meet other short-notice operational requirements.
18. The Secretariat maintains two mechanisms for the analysis of collected samples in support of a CI, an IAU, or other non-routine mission: (1) a deployable laboratory for on-site analysis operated by the Inspectorate, and (2) a network of designated laboratories available to carry out off-site analysis of samples. The list of designated laboratories is updated following proficiency testing. The current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic environmental samples can be found in Note S/2518/2023 (dated 4 April 2023). The current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic biomedical samples can be found in Note S/2093/2022 (dated 25 August 2022).

Issues requiring further action by the Technical Secretariat

Exercises

19. The planning and conduct of exercises are essential to ensuring and strengthening a response to a CI or an IAU. Some activities planned for the conduct of exercises in 2022 and 2023 continued to be affected by available financial resources, staff availability, and mission prioritisation.

Tenure of inspectors

20. A considerable number of experienced inspectors will reach their tenure in October 2023, and there are fewer potential inspector candidates with previous chemical weapons or related experience. Consequently, the planning and implementation of specialised trainings, which require financial resources, are essential to maintaining readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU.

Issues requiring further action by States Parties

21. As mentioned in previous reports, the ability of the OPCW to respond promptly to requests for a CI and/or an IAU could be seriously affected by a lack of standing arrangements that require action by States Parties in accordance with Part II of the Verification Annex to the Convention (hereinafter “the Verification Annex”), as follows:
- (a) In accordance with paragraph 10 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to provide designated OPCW inspectors with multiple-entry visas that are valid for at least two years. As at 31 May 2023, 134 States Parties (69%) had either issued, or promised to issue, two-year multiple-entry visas, or had no visa requirements for OPCW inspectors travelling with a United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP); 32 States Parties (17%) had issued multiple-entry visas valid for one year (or less); and 27 States Parties (14%) had either not responded or had provided incomplete general visa information that does not apply to OPCW inspectors travelling on UNLPs. It may be worthwhile recalling that States Parties that impose visa requirements on UNLP holders could also consider agreeing to a waiver of the standard visa requirements for UNLP holders in the event of a CI or an IAU.
 - (b) In accordance with paragraph 16 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to designate the points of entry that are to be used by mission teams. As of 31 May 2023, 137 States Parties had provided information regarding points of entry whereas 56 States Parties are yet to designate points of entry.
 - (c) In accordance with paragraph 22 of Part II of the Verification Annex, States Parties are under an obligation to inform the Secretariat of the standing diplomatic clearance number (SDCN) for non-scheduled aircraft. As of 31 May 2023, 22 States Parties had provided SDCNs on a permanent basis, while 16 had provided information on expediting them in the event that a requirement arises. It should be noted that an additional 15 States Parties provide SDCNs on an annual basis.
 - (d) In accordance with paragraph 44 of Part II of the Verification Annex, inspectors shall have the right to communicate with the Headquarters of the Organisation and to use their own two-way system of communications between team members during inspections. Accordingly, States Parties must inform the OPCW of the radio frequencies available for use by the inspection teams for such purposes. As of 31 May 2023, 84 States Parties had provided frequencies or had given the Secretariat authorisation to use OPCW default frequencies and/or had provided conditions for their use, or had confirmed or provided information on an expedited method for obtaining the necessary frequencies in 2023. As at the same date, 109 States Parties had not provided any records regarding radio frequencies.

22. Bilateral agreements should be further pursued between States Parties and the Secretariat for the provision of independent air transport within short notice to ensure the rapid deployment of inspection teams. States Parties' support in providing air transport and pre-approved flight clearances for non-scheduled aircraft will further solidify the Secretariat's preparedness to conduct CIs and IAUs. This is crucial in the case that commercial transport limitations are imposed, such as in areas of conflict.
23. The Secretariat continues to encourage States Parties to jointly organise and host exercises and trainings or to provide training venues that can enhance the investigative and response capabilities, specifically for inspectors and relevant Secretariat staff required for CIs or IAUs.
24. The Secretariat continues to urge States Parties to share research on technologies pertaining to personal protection equipment, medical countermeasures, identification, and decontamination regarding emerging chemical threats.

Conclusion

25. During the reporting period, the Secretariat maintained its readiness to conduct CIs and IAUs. The Secretariat will strive to adapt to emerging chemical threats and complex environments by conducting further relevant training, planning exercises, and exploring novel technologies with the support and cooperation of the States Parties.
26. However, as highlighted last year in the Director-General's report on the implementation of the tenure policy (EC-100/DG.8/Add.1, dated 28 September 2022), the recruitment of new inspectors on a seven-year maximum tenure continues to create challenges in the planning and balancing of technical specialties to ensure that the necessary skills and experience are maintained within the Secretariat. These constraints continue to apply not only to on-site verification activities, but also to training of inspectors, capacity-building activities for States Parties in the field of international cooperation and assistance, and knowledge transfer.
27. Therefore, further discussions on the issues surrounding the Organisation's seven-year tenure policy and the possibility for granting the Director-General with limited exceptional modalities (limited extensions of staff and rehiring of former staff) similar to those in place in other tenure-based organisations, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe will inevitably be necessary.
28. The Secretariat reiterates its appreciation for the assistance that States Parties have contributed thus far, including through the adoption of the decision concerning the rehiring of inspectors (C-27/DEC.9, dated 28 November 2022), and encourages their continuing support.