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### **OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 103RD SESSION**

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the 103rd Session of the Executive Council.
2. I congratulate the new Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Lucian Fătu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the OPCW. Ambassador, your wealth of experience in diplomacy will be of immense benefit to the work of the Council.
3. I extend my appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Ziad Al Atiyah, Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the OPCW, for his inclusive and able stewardship of the Council.
4. I convey my gratitude to all the outgoing Members of the Council and welcome the new ones joining us today.
5. Today we celebrate the announcement by the President of the United States last Friday that, after the verification conducted by the Secretariat, the United States completed the destruction of all its declared chemical weapons stockpiles on Friday, 7 July. This is a significant success for the United States, for multilateral diplomacy, and for the OPCW. Here in the room attending this meeting we enjoy the company of the Under Secretary of State, Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Head of the American Delegation. This is a demonstration of the importance and interest the United States has dedicated to this matter. I wish to thank you, Madam Under Secretary, for the effort you made in joining us today for this Executive Council session. Your presence is especially appreciated. With the end of destruction in the United States, we have completed the first pillar of destruction set forth by the Convention at its inception: the total elimination of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. It means that a total of 72,304 metric tonnes has been irreversibly destroyed under stringent verification. This is a great common success that calls for collective recognition and celebration by all of you Member States. This represents a historic moment for the OPCW. Yet there are more challenges ahead of us, which we have long identified. We must now intensify our efforts to address them by:
  - (a) increasing our focus on prevention and deterrence;
  - (b) strengthening the capacity of the States Parties to fully implement the Convention and face new threats;
  - (c) maintaining and reinforcing the capabilities of the Organisation; and
  - (d) ensuring that our activities are responding to the opportunities and challenges presented by scientific and technological advances.



6. During the preparatory process for the Fifth Review Conference, under the chairpersonship of the Ambassador of Estonia, States Parties offered an impressive number of proposals on how we might deliver on these priorities.
7. Additionally, the retreat organised by the Ambassador of the Netherlands, which took place in Santpoort on 25 and 26 April, offered us a unique opportunity to have an intense and rich exchange of points of view that boosted the preparatory process for the Conference. During the Fifth Review Conference, active participation on the part of the States Parties took place, demonstrating your knowledge and interest. I commend the efforts and leadership of Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast of the Netherlands, who conducted the work of the Conference in a sensible and efficient way. In the absence of an outcome document, which could not be agreed upon despite the efforts that were made, your work and proposals provide a sound foundation and ample elements for working together well into the future. Common ground was forged on many issues, including:
  - (a) adapting the Convention's industry verification regime;
  - (b) enhancing the OPCW's international cooperation activities;
  - (c) continuing assistance and protection programmes; and
  - (d) strengthening organisational governance.
8. In this respect, I encourage the active participation of all States Parties, to build upon the concrete work led by the four co-facilitators on governance issues since 2020. Sustaining a high-performing Secretariat that attracts and retains world-class skills, knowledge, and expertise is at present more important than ever for the adaptation we have already started.
9. During the preparatory process for the Review Conference, the Latin America and Caribbean Group proposed establishing a working group open to all interested States Parties to work with the Secretariat on achieving a wider and more geographically diverse pool of professionals. I also welcome the consultations that have commenced in this area.
10. Industry verification plays a pivotal role in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons within the chemical industry. The review of the verification regime currently under way within the Industry Cluster is a very relevant matter. It will address some of the serious challenges in this area. For example, it is critical that the declaration of national chemical industries, consistent with the Convention's criteria, maintain its accuracy and comprehensiveness. Over the last 30 years, the global chemical industry has grown in scale and complexity. In this context, the lack of domestic implementing legislation poses a direct challenge to the effectiveness of industry verification. If such legislation were in place in all States Parties with national chemical industries, we estimate that approximately 350 additional plant sites would be declared and inspectable. I urge those States Parties that have not yet done so to accelerate the enactment of implementing legislation as a matter of urgency.

11. A different challenge in this area is the growing number of sites and the use of Schedule 2 chemicals, and the consequent impact on our ability to carry out all the planned annual inspections. I wish to inform you that the Organisation will be faced with an unsustainable situation if matters do not change. These issues, and others currently under review in the Industry Cluster, require decisive action by the States Parties. Additionally, the impact of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, bio-mediated synthesis, additive manufacturing, and robotics will facilitate growth in new chemicals and production processes. While these technological advancements will bring numerous benefits, the dangers they may present cannot be overlooked. For this reason, the OPCW must stay vigilant and ready to adopt measures to safeguard against their diversion or misuse.
12. To facilitate other discussions among States Parties in the follow-up to the Fifth Review Conference that took place last May, the Secretariat has prepared and issued two papers: one on promoting gender equality across the Organisation, and one on engagement with civil society. I kindly request that these be carefully considered. I hope that States Parties will find these contributions useful.
13. Several years ago, the Secretariat embarked on a process of adaptation to ensure it is ready and equipped to continue to implement the mandates it has received from the Convention and the policy-making organs. This has materialised through the project for the construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre), which was carried out with success thanks to the support of the States Parties. To date, financial contributions and pledges totalling EUR 34.6 million have been received from 57 countries, the European Union, and other donors. In line with the provisions of the Programme and Budget 2022–2023, three new programmes were launched at the ChemTech Centre on its inauguration day. These projects are related to preventing illicit transfers of chemicals, addressing the use of biotoxins as weapons, and ensuring that the Secretariat can reliably evaluate new technologies and equipment in the market.
14. Furthermore, several activities in international cooperation and assistance and protection are already being conducted for States Parties there, as I will outline shortly. The Secretariat will gradually develop other activities within the available human and financial resources, always in line with the current and future biennial programme and budget.
15. In the Syrian Arab Republic, our work continues on several matters. Through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Secretariat has continued its efforts to clarify the shortcomings noted in its initial declaration. As I have previously reported, since April 2021, Syria has persisted in conditioning the twenty-fifth round of consultations on the exclusion of the DAT's lead technical expert. Given this limitation imposed by Syria, the Secretariat proposed organising a second round of limited in-country activities (LICA), with a reduced team of the DAT. They took place from 12 to 19 April 2023. Details of these activities were provided during the Secretariat's briefing on 3 July and in my Note on the work of the DAT (EC-103/HP/DG.1, dated 6 July 2023). I reiterate that Syria has the obligation to allow immediate and unfettered access to personnel designated by the OPCW under the Convention and pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and the relevant decisions of the OPCW policy-making organs. I also note that despite repeated requests by the Secretariat, no pending documents or declarations have been submitted by Syria during

- the intersessional period. Considering the identified substantial shortcomings that remain unresolved, the Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by Syria still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Convention, the relevant decisions of the Council and Conference, as well as resolution 2118 (2013).
16. These matters and several others were discussed during a meeting in Beirut, Lebanon, on 22 and 23 June, between experts of the Secretariat and a delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.
  17. The conduct of the twenty-fifth round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority was discussed as the best possible way forward to achieve outcomes related to Syria's resolution of the current outstanding issues. The Secretariat emphasised again that the resumption of rounds of consultations would have to be conducted with all experts, including the DAT's lead expert, who has been prevented from deploying since September 2021. On this basis, the Syrian side agreed to refer the matter to the Head of the Syrian National Authority, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, H.E. Mr Faisal Mekdad, and revert back to the Secretariat.
  18. The Syrian side committed to present proposals with a view to find solutions for the unresolved issues. As of today, I have not received any such proposals from Syria. The meeting in Beirut also served to confirm the extension of the Tripartite Agreement between Syria, the United Nations Office for Project Services, and the OPCW, which provides the legal framework for all OPCW-related activities in Syria.
  19. We are in the process of planning the tenth inspection of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), pursuant to the Council's decision of November 2016.
  20. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) continues to gather information on all allegations for which the Secretariat has yet to issue reports. On 28 June 2023, the Secretariat issued the report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission regarding incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Kharbit Massasneh, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 July and 4 August 2017 (S/2186/2023). The information obtained and analysed did not provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents. On 3 July, the Secretariat provided a briefing to inform States Parties on this matter. I call upon all States Parties in possession of information regarding any allegations that occurred in Syria to share their information with the FFM.
  21. Following the issuance of its latest report, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues progressing with its investigations.
  22. In Ukraine, the Secretariat has continued its activities under the Convention related to assistance and protection upon Ukraine's request. It has provided several training courses to Ukrainian first responders and other specialists, including customised training on investigating incidents involving chemicals. More of such activities are planned throughout the year. The Secretariat has received chemical detection equipment, with a further consignment expected in the near future. We will now start planning for delivery of this equipment to Ukrainian first responders, along with specialist training on its use. To date, total voluntary contributions and pledges to the

Ukraine assistance project stand at EUR 2.06 million, of which EUR 1.16 million has been committed.

23. Beyond Ukraine, we are augmenting training and capacity-building support to States Parties through activities of international cooperation and assistance and protection programmes. Since the last session of the Executive Council in March, the Secretariat's experts have conducted 30 capacity-building and coordination events, benefitting around 850 participants representing Member States from all geographical regions. Four of these events were conducted at the ChemTech Centre, including:
  - (a) a two-day online refresher course on assistance and protection for instructors from the East African Community in April;
  - (b) a symposium on women in chemistry in June;
  - (c) a workshop on policy and diplomacy for scientists, also in June; and
  - (d) a basic analytical chemistry course for women chemists this month.
24. More programmes benefitting States Parties are due to be rolled out at the ChemTech Centre in the coming months. Special attention will continue to be given to training courses for women as part of the effort aimed at strengthening gender equality across the Organisation.
25. 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 31 May 2023, a total of 69,356 of the 98,293 declared items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) on the territory of China had been reported by Japan as destroyed. This has been verified by the Secretariat. Since the last session of the Council, on-site inspections in China, which were suspended as a result of the pandemic, have resumed. Five ACW inspections were completed by the Secretariat at the storage sites of Haerbaling, Jiujiang, Ningan, and Wuhan, and the destruction facility at Haerbaling, in addition to visits to the excavation and recovery sites at Haerbaling and Jiamusi.
26. Regarding old chemical weapons (OCW), since the last session of the Council the Secretariat conducted one OCW inspection in Germany, from 3 to 5 April 2023. Further OCW inspections are planned later this year.
27. We continue to work with inspected States Parties to meet the 200 chemical industry inspections planned for 2023. Fifty-two Article VI chemical industry inspections took place in the intersessional period. Of the 39 States Parties scheduled to receive Article VI inspections in 2023, 10 have already completed their entire Article VI inspection plans. The unprecedented rise in travel costs forces the Secretariat to continue to closely monitor the feasibility of the implementation of the 2023 inspection plan. Given the circumstances, an increase in the next biennium budget in relation to the conduct of Article VI-mandated inspections is inevitable. We have already been conducting mandatory inspector training at the ChemTech Centre. The use of the training area there expands the training capabilities of the Organisation and generates cost efficiencies by reducing the need for use of the facilities of external training providers.

28. During the intersessional period, the work of the subsidiary and other bodies also progressed. I am referring to the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF), and others. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of these bodies for the considerable time that they dedicate to the OPCW.
29. At the meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism on 6 July, the Secretariat delivered a presentation on preparations for the multi-component chemical emergency response exercise for the Africa Region (“CHEMEX Africa”), scheduled for this autumn in Algiers, Algeria. Building on discussions at the previous meeting held on 6 March, the Working Group further considered arrangements for a table-top exercise to be held later in 2023. This exercise will connect national entities that deal with counterterrorism, and help identify gaps and challenges in areas such as prevention, response, and investigation.
30. The SAB’s Temporary Working Group on the Analysis of Biotoxins finalised its end-of-mandate report in April. The report and its recommendations are of great importance and will be considered by the SAB at its next session. I would like to remind States Parties that there are five members of the SAB with tenures that are ending this year. I count on you to nominate eminent experts to be considered for this important Board.
31. The Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) held its Fifteenth Session in June. The Board briefed States Parties on 21 June on their activities and future priorities. I thank the Permanent Representation of Germany for sponsoring this briefing for the States Parties. I congratulate Professor Magda Bauta Soles of Cuba on her re-election as Chairperson of the Board in 2024, and Professor Graciela Gonzalez of Argentina on her election as Vice-Chairperson in 2024.
32. The Fifty-Fourth Session of the ABAF was held from 6 to 8 June 2023. Among other matters, the ABAF discussed the measures that the Secretariat has taken to mitigate the impact of the unforeseeable inflation and its implications on the Organisation’s Programme and Budget.
33. The Biennial Draft Programme and Budget for 2024–2025 represents the second biennial programme and budget for the Organisation following the Conference decision in 2019 (C-24/DEC.11, dated 28 November 2019) requesting the Organisation to transition to this form of budget preparation. The provisions in the 2024–2025 Draft Biennium Programme and Budget to maintain the Organisation’s purchasing power are necessary. At the last session of the Council, I reported on the challenges posed by the impact of the exceptionally high level of inflation experienced since early 2022. According to the Dutch Central Bank, inflation in the Netherlands in 2022 was 11.8%. In 2023, it is forecasted at 4.2%. Higher costs due to this inflation have put strong pressure on the Organisation’s budget in crucial areas, such as utilities, rents, travel, and staff remuneration via obligatory increases mandated by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). Additionally, providers of travel, utilities, and building services have increased their costs beyond the high average rate of inflation that I just mentioned. The Secretariat cannot mitigate them completely. By way of example, in spite of a 30% reduction in electricity consumption with special measures adopted by the Secretariat last winter, this cost rose over 100% compared to the previous year.

States Parties will have the opportunity to discuss the Draft Programme and Budget during the facilitation process that will start in September. In this context, I recall that the total budget of the OPCW continues to be very modest, and is one of the lowest compared to other international organisations. With this in mind, I must reiterate the importance of all States Parties paying their assessed contributions and other reimbursable costs for inspection activities as early as possible. As an example, the total outstanding contributions for the five States Parties with the biggest arrears is more than EUR 28.1 million, which represents 82% of the total outstanding contributions of more than EUR 34.2 million.

34. Looking forward, I am pleased to inform the Council that the 2023 OPCW–The Hague Award opened for nominations last month. I encourage States Parties to nominate suitable candidates for this prestigious prize. The OPCW–The Hague Award extends the 2013 Nobel Prize legacy by recognising the outstanding contributions of persons or institutions to the common tasks undertaken towards a world free of chemical weapons.
35. I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the staff of the Secretariat: they continue to deliver with professionalism and dedication. I seize this opportunity to highlight changes in the Secretariat's Senior Management team. I extend a warm welcome to Marcin Wróblewski from the Eastern Europe Group as our new Director of the Office of Strategy and Policy. I also warmly welcome the new Director of the IIT, Ambassador Hernán Salinas Burgos, and the new Director of the Inspectorate, Mr Ildefonso Campos Velarde, both from the Latin America and Caribbean Group. I wish to thank the former Coordinator of the IIT, Ambassador Santiago Oñate, for his dedicated service to the OPCW.
36. The OPCW, States Parties and staff alike are in a good position to build on our 26-year legacy of success. As I remarked at the closing of the Fifth Review Conference, your national documents contained a wide scope of proposals and analyses that demonstrate remarkable knowledge, interest, and effort. In advancing these proposals, the roles of the policy-making organs assume even greater significance. You can count on the independent and professional staff of the Secretariat to support you in this endeavour. Underlining that the suffering of the victims of chemical weapons and their families are always in my mind, I wish you a productive session.

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