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### **OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 104TH SESSION**

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to this 104th Session of the Executive Council.
2. I thank Ambassador Lucian Fătu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the OPCW, for his ongoing efforts and commitment in steering the work of the Council in this new phase of the OPCW's work.
3. The completion of the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles in July this year fulfils one of the main goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention and is a great success for the Organisation and for multilateral diplomacy. From now on, the Organisation must intensify its focus on addressing existing and new threats, and for this purpose, on increasing international cooperation and developing the highest levels of expertise.
4. The States Parties and the Secretariat have long recognised, including at the Fifth Review Conference, that new and emerging risks and opportunities, such as a chemical industry growing in size and sophistication, as well as technological and scientific advancements, are already impacting the implementation of the Convention.
5. Several years ago, the Secretariat began a process of preparing for this anticipated change.
6. The aim was to ensure readiness to continue executing the mandates conferred by the Convention and the policy-making organs, in a dynamic security context.
7. As a result of this process, the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) was conceptualised, designed, and constructed. Today, thanks to the vision of the States Parties, the Organisation is already utilising this powerful tool to respond to the challenges ahead of us. The great potential of the Centre will be gradually developed in line with the OPCW's Programme and Budget targets. This session provides me with an opportunity to update the Council on how the Secretariat has delivered on its mandates during the intersessional period, and how the ChemTech Centre is already an important component of this endeavour. Your collective vision of the urgent need for an OPCW ready for the future has started to be implemented. The first priority lies in the need to develop, preserve, enhance, and transfer the Secretariat's knowledge and expertise. This is the only way to use the new instruments provided by progress in science and technology for the benefit of the Organisation, and to tackle the serious risks of this era.



8. This ambitious and realistic agenda is reflected in the revised Draft 2024–2025 Biennium Budget proposal, which the Secretariat has prepared and which is before you today. The revision of the initial proposal, which was published in July, was guided by the significant feedback from States Parties, as well as the advice of the budget co-facilitators. I wish to take this opportunity to recognise the active engagement of the States Parties in this process, the outcome of which will define the success of this Organisation over the next two years. I also extend my high appreciation to the co-facilitators, Mr Frank Groome of Ireland and Mr Jerzy Gierasimiuk of Poland, for their outstanding and pragmatic efforts in guiding the States Parties in this important matter. I recall that the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF), in its report published last July (ABAF-55/1, dated 27 July 2023), concluded that the proposed Budget for 2024 and 2025 had been prepared, I quote, “in a sound, methodical, and logical way”. States Parties’ support for this Budget will be critical in ensuring that the Organisation can fulfil its mandates in an increasingly demanding technological and international security context.
9. The Secretariat’s activities during the intersessional period demonstrate how it is responding to these developments.
10. Notably, we are expanding our activities to the benefit of States Parties, particularly in the areas of international cooperation, including national implementation and assistance and protection. Since the last session of the Council, the Secretariat has conducted 19 capacity-building events, benefitting 545 participants from all geographical regions. Two of these activities made use of the ChemTech Centre platform, namely:
  - (a) the basic analytical chemistry course for women chemists; and
  - (b) the first in-person training course on investigation of incidents involving toxic industrial chemicals.
11. Alongside this work, the Secretariat continues to play a key role in supporting States Parties to reduce the risks of chemicals being used as weapons.
12. In this regard, it was my privilege to attend, last week in Algiers, CHEMEX Africa, co-organised by the Government of Algeria and the OPCW. This was the first pan-African chemical emergency response capacity-building exercise. This event was held in line with the priorities identified in the Africa Programme. I wish to convey my gratitude to the Government of Algeria for so generously hosting the event to a high global standard and for warmly welcoming us to Algeria. I wish also to express my appreciation to the Government of Canada for funding this important initiative. I wish to highlight the efficient coordination undertaken by Ambassador Salima Abdelhak of Algeria, who was also present during the event. This event, hosted by the Chief of Staff of the Army and attended by the Prime Minister and several Cabinet Ministers, demonstrates the interest and awareness of Algeria regarding the new risks we are facing, including terrorism. It further illustrates the will to respond to them, with a regional approach to capacity-building support for States Parties. CHEMEX Africa in Algeria enhanced the preparedness of African teams, with the participation of 80 first responders from 33 States Parties, to manage and respond to complex chemical emergencies, through two weeks of intensive training and drills. This included incidents and attacks that might be perpetrated by non-State actors.

13. In Algiers I had the opportunity to have a private conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of South Sudan, Mr James Pitiya Morgan. The Minister recognised the importance of upholding the global norm against chemical weapons, and we discussed in length South Sudan's progress towards treaty accession. At the end of the meeting, we signed a joint communiqué, in which we agreed to work together to complete the accession process as soon as possible.
14. In this respect, the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism will remain a vital contribution to confronting chemical terrorism. At the Group's meeting of 6 October, exchanges with a qualified official from INTERPOL were useful. We must take into account that terrorists may take advantage of new technologies. Only last month, a PhD student in the United Kingdom was convicted of designing and building, for the Islamic State terrorist group, a drone that was capable of delivering a chemical weapon. The police reported that, using components created with his 3D printer, he had constructed a purpose-built drone that could carry explosives or chemicals. The device was found in his bedroom, along with a 3D printer and notebooks filled with recipes for chemical weapons, including ricin, sarin, and mustard gas. Thankfully, his efforts were thwarted following his swift arrest earlier this year. This example attests to the seriousness of the threat we all face.
15. More fundamentally, the implementation of the OPCW's verification regime, despite its limitations, will underpin our efforts, in curbing the diversion of toxic chemicals, which are used by the chemical industry for legitimate purposes. The Secretariat continues to carry out its inspections of the chemical industry. During the intersessional period, 51 Article VI chemical industry inspections took place. I note that, because of operational and logistical constraints outside the Secretariat's control, it will not be possible to complete the 200 Article VI inspections planned for 2023.
16. To maintain a robust verification regime that continues to ensure confidence in compliance, it must be adapted to the current trends in the chemical industry, namely:
  - (a) the growth of the chemical industry in scale and complexity;
  - (b) the growing number of industrial sites that use, for legal purposes, Schedule 2 chemicals; and
  - (c) the geographical distribution of declarable chemical production sites.
17. In this context, I welcome States Parties' ongoing deliberations within the industry cluster.
18. Verification is an important tool to monitor the chemical industry. But in the Organisation, verification needs to uphold the highest global standard, because in addition to the chemical industry, chemistry is also used for other purposes. In recent years, the pace of technological developments has been unprecedented. The boundaries between the physical, biological, and digital realms are becoming increasingly blurred. And technologies are converging or being readily transferred from one sector to another. The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has not escaped anyone's notice. The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) noted that AI is a cross-cutting technology, with an unparalleled flexibility of applications. Scientific publications are prolific and growing, and they show myriad recent AI applications. AI is being integrated into several technologies, including chemistry, drones, robotics, and

biotechnology. The impact of these emerging technologies is accelerating innovation in chemical research and production processes. These advancements will provide countless benefits, including streamlining chemical weapons-related research, and will reinforce the OPCW's verification regime. Yet, we should bear in mind that AI could also facilitate the re-emergence of chemical weapons. For instance, AI could be misused to design chemicals with custom properties, including high toxicity. AI could also be used to identify novel pathways to produce chemical weapon agents, avoiding the use of classical precursors and circumventing the schedules on chemicals, thereby undermining verification. As a result, the OPCW must remain vigilant and prepared to mitigate these risks to the Convention's implementation, and to support States Parties in doing the same. The Secretariat is developing an internal road map on how AI will impact our common task, which will serve as a guide for future discussions and possible decisions.

19. I wish to highlight the significant role we foresee for the ChemTech Centre in augmenting the Secretariat's capabilities to keep abreast of scientific and technological developments, through training, scientific research, and testing the new and most modern equipment.
20. In the intersessional period, other activities such as Inspectorate training, laboratory exercises, and proficiency testing also occurred at the Centre. These include evaluation of the results of the latest proficiency tests and a biotoxin exercise, a specialised course on deterrence and prevention of chemical weapons and use of toxic industrial chemicals, from a law enforcement perspective, and the fifty-sixth meeting of the Validation Group for new data submitted for inclusion in the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD).
21. Keeping pace with advancements in science and technology will occur in tandem with the Organisation's long-standing mandates on non-stockpiled chemical weapons.
22. Concerning abandoned chemical weapons (ACW), China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China. As at 31 August 2023, a total of 78,092 of the 105,234 declared items of ACW on the territory of China had been reported by Japan as destroyed. This has been verified by the Secretariat. During the intersessional period, two ACW inspections were completed by the Secretariat at the mobile destruction and storage facility in Harbin.
23. Regarding old chemical weapons (OCW), since the last session of the Council the Secretariat conducted one inspection in Italy in September 2023. One further OCW inspection is planned later this year.
24. An outstanding task that must be addressed is our decade-long engagement in the Syrian Arab Republic. Ten years after the Syrian Arab Republic's accession to the Convention, there are reported and documented uses of chemical weapons and unresolved issues concerning its initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme. Reflecting on 10 years of the Syrian Arab Republic's membership in the Organisation, the Secretariat prepared a Note dated 27 September 2023, which has been shared with the States Parties (S/2213/2023). This Note recounts the accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Convention and the challenges faced by the international community to ensure the

Syrian Arab Republic's compliance with the provisions of the Convention. It outlines what has yet to be completed for the Syrian Arab Republic to fully meet its obligations. Finally, it provides points for consideration by States Parties in this regard. In the last 10 years, the Organisation, actively supported by the States Parties, has destroyed all declared chemical weapons facilities and, outside the Syrian territory, has destroyed the chemical weapons arsenal declared by the Syrian Arab Republic.

25. Unfortunately, today's reality is that the work is still unfinished. The Syrian Arab Republic has not declared everything it possessed or possesses. And it has hindered the work of the Secretariat by preventing one of its lead technical experts to deploy with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and engage in consultations for the Syrian Arab Republic to clarify all of the shortcomings in its initial declaration. The outstanding issues are not related to small adjustments in the declaration. The Syrian Arab Republic has failed to declare the production and fate of substantial quantities and types of chemical warfare agents, as well as large quantities of aerial bombs specifically designed to carry chemical warfare agents. The Syrian Arab Republic has also failed to declare or fully declare chemical weapons facilities and relevant activities. At the same time, use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic has been documented and reported. Its perpetrators in some instances have even been identified by international independent expert entities, from the Secretariat's teams to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Other reports have further independently documented the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic over the past 10 years, including reports from: the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic—the so-called Pinheiro Commission—the United Nations Mission to Investigate Alleged Uses of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic—also known as the Sellström mission—and the World Health Organization. The Secretariat will continue to deliver on all the mandates it has received, and to seek your guidance and support. It is up to you, States Parties, to decide how you wish to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic abides by all its obligations.
26. The DAT has continued its efforts to have the Syrian Arab Republic clarify the shortcomings identified in its initial declaration. Since April 2021, the Syrian Arab Republic has persisted in conditioning the twenty-fifth round of consultations on the exclusion of the DAT's lead technical expert, contrary to its obligations under United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). To date, the Secretariat has not received any repeatedly requested documents from the Syrian Arab Republic. In the meantime, the Secretariat deployed a reduced team composed of several members of the DAT to conduct limited in-country activities (LICA) in January and April 2023. A meeting also took place in June in Beirut, Lebanon, between delegations from the Secretariat and the Syrian Arab Republic, during which the conduct of the twenty-fifth round of consultations was discussed. This meeting was proposed by the Syrian National Authority to present proposals with a view to finding solutions for the unresolved issues found in the Syrian Arab Republic's declarations. During the meeting and since then, the Syrian delegation has not presented any such proposals.
27. I am pleased to share with you that, yesterday, the Secretariat received a note verbale from the Permanent Representation of the Syrian Arab Republic informing the Secretariat that, I quote: "the Syrian National Authority welcomes the convening of the 25th round of consultations with the DAT on the date suggested by the Technical

Secretariat of the OPCW with the full participation of all members of the DAT". I welcome this decision. It will allow the DAT to deploy soon and continue its consultations with the Syrian authorities to clarify the outstanding issues, if security conditions allow. It is unfortunate that it took two and a half years of efforts from the Secretariat for the Syrian Arab Republic to decide that full rounds of consultations with all experts were the best possible way forward.

28. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) is currently gathering information and analysing data regarding five groups of allegations covering over 15 incidents. Since the last session of the Council, the FFM has conducted one deployment to collect further information regarding allegations mentioned in the briefing that the Secretariat gave to States Parties on 28 September. The FFM is in contact with the Syrian Arab Republic in preparation for upcoming deployments. It will report on the allegations under investigation in due course.
29. The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues progressing with its investigations. The IIT is also preserving, reviewing, and transferring information and evidence collected during its investigations to the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), as mandated by the Conference of the States Parties. The IIT is also working on ensuring the transfer of knowledge acquired in the course of its activities to other relevant units of the Secretariat.
30. I wish to underline that all the mandates related to the Syrian chemical dossier, conferred by the Convention and decisions of the policy-making organs, remain binding on all States Parties as well as the Secretariat. I recall that it is up to States Parties to ensure that the Secretariat has the means to carry out its mandated activities. It also behoves the policy-making organs to decide on the measures to be adopted, to ensure that the Syrian Arab Republic fulfils all its obligations.
31. Turning to Ukraine, the Secretariat has continued its activities related to assistance and protection, upon that State Party's request. In the intersessional period, the Secretariat launched a special course on emergency response to incidents involving toxic chemicals, which is being attended by 37 Ukrainian first responders and other specialists. There are more activities like this one still planned for this year. The Secretariat has acquired a significant amount of chemical detection equipment, to be provided to Ukraine, with further consignments expected in the near future. As soon as the equipment arrives in Ukraine, the Secretariat will commence a programme of specialist training on its use. To date, total voluntary contributions and pledges to the Ukraine assistance project stand at EUR 2.2 million, of which EUR 1.6 million has been committed.
32. To deliver on these wide-ranging mandates I have outlined, the Secretariat must be administratively agile. It must also be equipped with resources commensurate to the tasks the Secretariat is being required to perform.
33. I began my statement by highlighting that the revised Draft 2024–2025 Biennium Budget proposal will be a critical driver of success in the Secretariat's implementation of the Organisation's agenda.
34. Regarding assessed contributions, it is more vital than ever that these are paid in full and on time for the Secretariat to deliver effectively and efficiently.

35. Financial resources aside, maintaining a world-class service also requires the ability to attract, retain, and develop top talent that is diverse, representative of its membership, and gender-balanced.
36. To this end, I welcome the decision of States Parties at the last session of the Council to form a working group on geographical distribution.
37. States Parties also agreed to open a facilitation on the tenure policy, with a view to bringing forward to the Conference of the States Parties, at its next session, recommendations regarding a more flexible implementation of the tenure policy. Such flexibilities are critical for the Organisation to retain specialised institutional capacity in exceptional circumstances.
38. In addition, it bears mentioning that in this new stage of our work, the OPCW has been witnessing an increased interest from the public and other key stakeholders in its activities. This is evidenced, among other factors, by a six percent growth in followers on the Organisation's social media accounts, compared to 2022.
39. During my high-level discussions with senior officials, in Algeria last week and in the United Arab Emirates last September, I was pleased by the level of interest in and support for the OPCW's work.
40. I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute at this moment to the Ambassadors Permanent Representatives, Members of the Council, who have left us since our last session in July. I wish to thank the Ambassadors of Albania, Brazil, Canada, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, and Qatar. I also wish to share with the Council that I have been unofficially informed that some of you in this very room today may be leaving us, most likely before the next session of this Council in March next year. I cannot mention you by name, as your departures are not yet official, but I wish to thank you all for your commitment and work for this Organisation. All of you will be missed and remembered as outstanding professionals and friends. Your work for this Council, this Organisation, and this Convention will not be forgotten. At the same time, I wish to welcome those Ambassadors Permanent Representatives, Members of the Council, who have presented their credentials to me since last July. I welcome, again, Ambassador Vásquez Gomez of El Salvador. Welcome back, my friend. I am certain that the Council will benefit from your vast experience. I also welcome Ambassador Simas Magalhães of Brazil. I wish you a fruitful mission here in The Hague.
41. In closing, I wish to acknowledge the work of Ms Kazumi Ikeda-Larhed, Director of International Cooperation and Assistance. Kazumi will be leaving us shortly, and I wish her all the best. In the time you worked with us, dear Kazumi, you have fully participated in preparing the Secretariat to use the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, reviewed methods of work in your division, and ensured that it will continue to deliver.
42. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I wish you fruitful deliberations.