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OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE 106TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

1. I warmly welcome all delegations to the 106th Session of the Executive Council.
2. I congratulate the new Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Andrés Terán Parral, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the OPCW, on his election. Ambassador, I am confident that the Council will benefit from your extensive diplomatic experience, and especially from your knowledge on multilateral affairs.
3. I extend my appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Lucian Fătu, Permanent Representative of Romania to the OPCW, for his able stewardship of the Council.
4. I thank all the outgoing Members of the Council and welcome the new ones joining us today.
5. A year since the Organisation completed the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles, the Secretariat is still delivering on a full agenda. We have transitioned into the post-destruction era, with an intense focus on preventing the re-emergence and non-proliferation of chemical weapons.
6. In this phase, the Organisation is intensifying its activities to strengthen the capacity of the States Parties, to fully implement the Convention to enable them to face new threats.
7. Since the Council's last session in March, the Secretariat has undertaken 40 activities relating to international cooperation, assistance and protection, and national implementation, benefiting 1,050 participants, from all geographical regions. Eight of these activities have taken place at the Centre for Chemistry and Technology.
8. The Secretariat has also responded to requests for assistance and protection from States Parties.
9. Notably, from 11 to 16 May 2024, the Secretariat deployed a team to Seychelles on an assistance and protection mission at that Government's request. We provided technical advice and support to the authorities of Seychelles on coordination among relevant national stakeholders, and on establishing effective command channels for incidence response. This mission showed the capacity of the Secretariat to deploy and highlighted the country's capacity-building needs. Such needs include both the adoption of comprehensive implementing legislation and the necessity to scale up the level of preparedness and response. These are two key components to any effective management of chemical incidents. Additionally, in Seychelles the Secretariat ensured cooperation and synergies with other international organisations, entities, and experts on the ground, which will be useful in future cases.



10. An ongoing priority for the Secretariat in the intersessional period has been assessing and analysing the impact of scientific and technological developments, especially artificial intelligence (AI), in the field of chemistry and disarmament. The aim of the activities we have undertaken thus far has been to deepen our understanding of the risks and opportunities that AI may present for the Organisation. This approach will enable us to forge a comprehensive plan of action.
11. On 22 and 23 April 2024, I hosted an event with scientific experts, including the participation of a select group of directors and experts from the Secretariat, to exchange points of view and discuss specific aspects of interest for the Organisation. The two-day meeting took place here at the OPCW Main Building and at the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre). A Secretariat Note on this meeting (S/2289/2024, dated 23 May 2024) has been shared with all States Parties. The experts agreed that AI can already generate formulas for new dangerous toxic chemicals. But there was also a general agreement that the production of the chemicals based on those new formulas remains, to date, a very difficult task. There was also agreement that the AI field is developing rapidly and that it is necessary for the Organisation to continue to monitor developments, maintain continuous contact with the States Parties, and to participate in relevant international fora.
12. Before and after this meeting, I had periodic internal meetings with a group of directors and experts of the Secretariat to examine the matter. Additionally, on 28 June, upon the invitation of the German Federal Foreign Office, I delivered a keynote address at the opening of the conference on “AI and weapons of mass destruction”, which took place in Berlin at the Foreign Office. I would like to thank and congratulate Germany for this timely, successful, and well-attended event.
13. We are now preparing the next stage, which will take place in Morocco from 22 to 24 October this year. A conference, co-organised by the Government of Morocco and the Secretariat, will be convened in Rabat under the title “Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Advancing the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention”. The aim of the conference is to address the evolving risks of AI as a cross-cutting technology within the context of the Convention, focusing on its implications for chemical security and disarmament. I thank Morocco for hosting this event, along with the States Parties that have made financial contributions so far.
14. By cultivating relationships with experts in the chemical industry, academia, and relevant organisations, the Secretariat is complementing the important advice and recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). In this regard, and following a recommendation by the SAB at its recent session in May, I have decided to establish a new Temporary Working Group focused on AI. I will work with the Chairperson of the SAB to develop specific questions for the Group to focus on.
15. In keeping pace with scientific and technological advancements, the ChemTech Centre is a valuable resource for the Organisation. The Secretariat has used its state-of-the-art equipment and facilities to deliver a range of activities, including Inspectorate training, laboratory exercises, scientific research, proficiency testing, and international cooperation events. The Secretariat Note S/2304/2024 (dated 8 July 2024) highlights what we have accomplished at the Centre in just over a year of its operation.

16. Several scientific projects of particular interest are taking place at the ChemTech Centre. The most notable concern biotoxins analysis, chemical forensics, and chemical profiling. These seek to boost the analytical and investigative capacities of the Secretariat and designated laboratories.
17. Preventing re-emergence requires the Organisation to continue to address the threat posed by non-State actors. I wish to underscore the relevance of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism as the primary platform for States Parties and experts to exchange views on confronting this challenge. At its meeting on 5 July, which I attended, the Group considered an action plan to guide its future activities.
18. In curbing the risk of diversion and misuse of toxic chemicals by non-State actors, the OPCW's verification regime and its industry inspections remain crucial. The Secretariat continues to work with relevant States Parties to meet the planned target of 200 industry inspections for 2024. In the intersessional period, 82 chemical industry inspections were completed: five Schedule 1, 24 Schedule 2, one Schedule 3, and 52 other chemical production facility (OCPF) inspections. These deployments involved 30 States Parties.
19. In tandem with this routine work, we continue to build and enhance the skills and expertise of the Organisation's inspectors to maintain readiness in the face of a degraded security landscape. This includes preparing for non-routine activities, such as challenge inspections and investigations of alleged use, as well as technical assistance visits. A Note on the Secretariat's state of preparedness has been circulated to States Parties. It will be addressed during this session. Only States Parties can ensure that the Secretariat continues to have the financial and human resources to deliver as you expect, including by providing flexibility on rehiring. Since the last session of the Council, the Inspectorate Division has coordinated or participated in 19 training courses, benefiting 188 participants. Five of these courses were held at the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, involving 69 participants. These training courses took advantage of the training laboratory, classrooms, the evaluation equipment training area, and other training facilities at the ChemTech Centre.
20. I wish to seize this opportunity to remind States Parties of the importance of accurately reporting international transfers of scheduled chemicals as required by the Convention's verification regime. The Secretariat identifies relevant discrepancies in the data of these transfers from the exporting State and the importing State when evaluating and validating the declarations. For example, in 2022 there were a total of 618 transfer discrepancies regarding Schedule 2 and 3 chemicals, involving 94 States Parties. Notably, only in a small number of cases do the States Parties notify the Secretariat of the resolution of such discrepancies. I encourage you to undertake your best efforts to resolve them in a timely manner as the only way to maintain the credibility of the verification regime.
21. We will also continue to work closely with the World Customs Organization to encourage consistency in the recording and reporting of international transfers of scheduled chemicals.

22. The Secretariat also works to report annually on transfers of scheduled chemicals to the Syrian Arab Republic by States Parties in accordance with the decision of the Conference of the States Parties (C-28/DEC.12, dated 30 November 2023). I recall that according to this decision, it is up to States Parties to report to the Secretariat on their transfers of scheduled chemicals to the Syrian Arab Republic. Training and capacity-building activities in the field of assistance and protection will continue to benefit from experience acquired in the conduct of non-routine missions related to, inter alia, the Syrian chemical weapons dossier in the past decade. The Secretariat will ensure that its existing reporting integrates this aspect as per the decision of the Conference.
23. Trust in the OPCW's verification system is further underpinned by the OPCW's network of designated laboratories. During the intersessional period, two additional laboratories in Algeria and Poland were designated for the analysis of authentic environmental samples. The inclusion of a laboratory in Algeria is significant, as it means that the Africa region is once again represented in the network for the first time since 2006. As such, there is now at least one designated laboratory in every region of the world.
24. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat continued to verify the disposal of chemical weapons component wastes and rocket motors at the non-contiguous sites of the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant in Kentucky, and the Anniston Static Detonation Chamber in Alabama. One quarterly visit was conducted to Blue Grass, and another to the Anniston site.
25. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on Chinese territory. As of 31 May, a total of 92,061 of the 115,641 declared items of ACW on the territory of China had been reported by Japan as destroyed. This has been verified by the Secretariat.
26. Since last March, seven ACW inspections have been completed by the Secretariat in China: two inspections at the mobile destruction and storage facilities in Wuhan, three inspections at excavation and recovery, storage, and destruction facilities in Haerbaling, and two inspections at the Harbin storage and mobile destruction facilities.
27. Additionally, one ACW inspection has taken place in Münster, Germany.
28. Regarding old chemical weapons (OCW), since the last session of the Council, the Secretariat conducted one inspection in Germany on 5 July.
29. Even though the main task of stockpile destruction has been completed, the threat from chemical weapons persists. Accordingly, we must continue to address their use and allegations of use.
30. As demonstrated by the compendium of correspondence received by the Secretariat from the Russian Federation and Ukraine, shared with all States Parties, the threat of use of chemical weapons in conflict is a serious concern. I have briefed previous sessions of the Council on the Secretariat's support to Ukraine, upon its request, in the field of assistance and protection. Between September 2023 and May 2024, the Secretariat delivered an online specialised course composed of several modules on "Emergency response to incidents involving toxic chemicals" to 32 Ukrainian first responders. The course focused on strengthening preparedness against the threat of

chemical weapons use and responses in case of incidents. Last June, we further conducted two specialised training courses on “Sampling for investigation of chemical weapon use” for 40 Ukrainian experts at the ChemTech Centre. The courses focused on the handling of toxic chemicals, documentation, and sampling in case of incidents, so that those investigating allegations of use of toxic chemicals as weapons follow the highest international standards.

31. In addition, last week, from 2 to 3 July, a team of experts from the Secretariat deployed to Ukraine for a technical assistance visit. I thank the Government of Slovakia for facilitating the transit of the team and the equipment. This visit was organised upon a request made by Ukraine and following the entry into force of the ad hoc Privileges and Immunities Agreement for such activities on 24 May. The purpose of this visit was to provide protection and detection equipment to Ukrainian first responders, medics, and firefighters, and to train them on its handling. This equipment had been purchased through voluntary contributions from several States Parties to the Trust Fund on Assistance and Protection for Ukraine created under Article X. To date, a total of 2.4 million euros has been spent or committed of the 3.9 million euros received.
32. On 7 May, the Secretariat issued a statement pointing out that the information related to alleged use of chemical weapons provided to the Organisation by both Ukraine and the Russian Federation, together with the information available to the Secretariat, was insufficiently substantiated to reach any conclusion. The Secretariat recalled that it would need to be formally seized by at least one State Party with a specific substantiated request in order to conduct any activity pertaining to allegations of use of toxic chemicals as weapons.
33. With regard to the conflict in Gaza, the Secretariat continues to monitor the situation and any allegations of use of chemical weapons that could arise. To date, the Secretariat has no substantiated information on any use of chemical weapons in the area. We have also been following reports on allegations of the use of white phosphorus. I recall that when white phosphorus is used as a weapon, it can be considered an incendiary weapon, not a chemical weapon. White phosphorus is generally used for its thermal and incendiary properties. As long as the incendiary properties of white phosphorus are used as I mentioned, and not for its toxic properties, and as long as the design, production, weaponisation, and delivery are not modified, that may be indicative of its intended use, white phosphorus munitions may be covered by the Protocol III of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) as incendiary weapons.
34. On 2 July, the Secretariat provided its usual detailed briefing to States Parties about the Syrian Arab Republic chemical weapons file.
35. Through the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Secretariat has continued its efforts to clarify the shortcomings noted in Syria’s initial declaration. From 21 to 30 May 2024, the DAT was deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic to conduct the twenty-seventh round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority. During this round of consultations, the DAT conducted technical meetings with experts from the Syrian National Authority, visited three declared former chemical weapons-related sites, collected a total of eight samples at these sites, and interviewed three persons, including two senior officials from the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). All samples collected during the twenty-seventh round of consultations were processed at the OPCW Laboratory and shipped to be analysed at two designated laboratories.

36. Before the twenty-seventh round of consultations, which took place last May, there had been a total of 24 outstanding issues, of which 7 have been resolved and 17 remained outstanding.
37. In April 2023, the DAT collected samples in Syria. Most of them reflected what Syria had already declared. But we found traces of six undeclared chemical warfare agents in the analysis of those samples, which indicated undeclared activities at two formally declared chemical weapons sites. Since October 2023, we asked the Syrian Arab Republic to provide scientific and verifiable explanations. We repeatedly required this information between October 2023 and May 2024 during the twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth, and twenty-seventh rounds of consultations with the DAT, and we sent several notes verbales reminding the Syrian Arab Republic of the need to provide the necessary explanations. Some information was received, but no historical records or documents were ever provided to support the explanations, which were all theoretical—some scientifically possible and some not. A long time has elapsed, and no sufficient explanations have been received; as the substance of the issue is serious, the Secretariat needs to report the facts and the assessment of this situation to the States Parties. Consequently, the number of outstanding issues has increased from 17 to 19, some of which are of serious concern. The details can be found in my report on the work of the DAT dated 4 July 2024.
38. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) continues its work on credible allegations. The FFM is currently gathering information and analysing data regarding five groups of allegations covering over 15 incidents. Since the last Executive Council Session in March, the FFM has conducted two deployments, to collect further information regarding allegations.
39. On 11 June, the FFM issued a report on two allegations: one that occurred near the village of Qalib al-Thawr in the eastern countryside of al-Salamiyah, in the Hama Governorate, on 9 August 2017, and the other in al-Balil, which is in the surroundings of Souran in the Hama Governorate, on 8 November 2017. Both allegations had been reported by Syria in 2017. The Syrian Arab Republic did not provide witness testimonies or other information that could have been relevant to the FFM during its activities. The information provided was often contradictory. Overall, the information obtained and analysed is not sufficient to provide reasonable grounds to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in both instances.
40. Following the issuance of its latest report in February 2024, as discussed at the previous session of the Council, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues its work. The IIT also continues to preserve and review information and evidence collected during its investigations for the purposes of transferring them to the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), as mandated by the Conference of the States Parties. In addition, the IIT has continued the transfer of knowledge and skills to relevant units of the Secretariat. In this vein, the Secretariat has been developing a strategy to document all technical and scientific areas underpinning IIT investigations. These include investigative methodologies for the identification of perpetrators, selection and recruitment of, and engagement with, independent experts, combined use of different scientific and technical domains to support the identification of perpetrators, and techniques for the holistic assessment of different sources of information, evidence, and technical expertise.

41. Overall, the Syrian chemical weapons file is a stark reminder to us all that the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere in recent years continues to test the well-established norm against use. It is your responsibility, States Parties, to defend and promote this norm. This can only be achieved through political commitment and the granting of appropriate resources and flexibility for the Secretariat to continue its mandated activities. We continue to work for the expertise acquired during the exceptional missions led in the past decade to be integrated in core activities through the training of Secretariat staff.
42. Another unfinished item on the agenda for safeguarding the norm is ensuring that the four States not yet Party join the Convention. The Secretariat has maintained its engagement with South Sudan during the intersessional period. On 13 June 2024, I wrote a letter to the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, H.E. Ramadan Mohammed Abdallah Goc, reiterating the Secretariat's commitment to working with South Sudan to complete the accession process as soon as possible. I note that a representative from South Sudan attended as an observer the annual regional meeting of National Authorities of States Parties in Africa, which took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 11 to 13 June. The Secretariat will continue to intensify its efforts in promoting universality of the Convention. I invite all States Parties in a position to do so to reinforce their actions in this field.
43. The delivery of all the activities I have reported to this Council in the intersessional period has been made possible by the efforts of the Secretariat's dedicated staff. I express my profound appreciation to all of them.
44. I now seize this opportunity to update the Council about the improvement in the pension system for staff. The OPCW is increasingly an outsider in the international system, where major international organisations have already been integrated into the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF). This has led to considerable challenges for the Secretariat in the areas of recruitment and retention of staff for many key posts, including at the Director level. To ensure that the OPCW remains a modern workplace and that is fit for the future, it is crucial to address this situation. In this respect, the Secretariat has continued the preparatory work for possible membership in the UNJSPF. The necessary arrangements will be presented to the OPCW's policy-making organs in October and November 2024, in the form of amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules. They will include a set of transitional measures for serving staff members and will be carefully crafted to ensure the best outcome for the Organisation and all its staff members.
45. Regarding the staff of the Organisation, I wish to draw your attention to the 2023 Report on the Implementation of the Tenure Policy. It is essential for the proper functioning of the Secretariat to maintain and expand its flexibility related to the tenure policy and rehiring.
46. In this regard, I wish to emphasise that while there was only one rehired inspector in 2023 due to cyclic dynamics, the rehiring of inspectors in 2024 will again take on increased importance. The ability to rehire inspectors on a limited basis, as has been done in the last few years, remains a key element of knowledge retention and transfer. The authority to rehire inspectors continues to be essential in the absence of the broader rehiring system that the Secretariat has recommended for States Parties' consideration. It is therefore vital for the Secretariat to retain this authority when it comes up for review at the next Conference of the States Parties in November this year.

47. The OPCW building was stormed by violent demonstrators on 3 December 2021.
48. This brutal incursion made it clear that the building is very vulnerable. Since then, we have introduced important physical infrastructure security upgrades in response, financed exclusively with the regular budget. The garage gate has already been replaced. New access doors have been installed on the secure floors, and a project to make the lobby more secure is under way this year. The remaining requirements, such as a new fence and front guard house, substantially exceed current funding availability. The Secretariat has been, and will continue to be, in contact with the Host Country regarding the necessary measures to ensure the security of the Main Building and delegates and staff.
49. In closing, I call upon all present in this room to remember that the tools that have been developed over the past 27 years are key to defending the implementation of the Convention. Only a Secretariat fully equipped and prepared can assist States Parties upon their request. And only States Parties that fully implement this Convention can make it work. We will never forget the victims and the survivors of chemical weapons attacks, and our success will be measured against our capacity to honour them, working to maintain the high standards we have committed to uphold. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

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