

**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 that the Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) “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). The Second Review Conference reiterated this request to the Secretariat (paragraph 9.90 of RC-2/4, dated 18 April 2008).
2. 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).
3. The Third Review Conference requested the Secretariat to improve the standard of readiness to conduct a challenge inspection (CI) or an investigation of alleged use (IAU) in accordance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) and to keep the Executive Council (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 (subparagraphs 9.111(b) and (c) of RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013).
4. The Secretariat has previously submitted to the Council several updates on its readiness to conduct a CI or an IAU. These mechanisms were built into the Convention, based on the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons, for the purpose of addressing concerns over possible non-compliance with the provisions of the Convention. They were envisaged in a different security and political environment from the current one. Throughout the past decade the Secretariat has conducted contingency and non-routine operations in the Syrian Arab Republic and beyond, on an ad hoc and interim basis, inter alia, in Germany, Iraq, Malaysia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

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



Northern Ireland in relation to the use and the threat of use of toxic chemicals as weapons. These operations have taken place pursuant to the Convention and relevant decisions of the policy-making organs.

5. Given the nature of contemporary chemical weapons threats, States Parties have requested the Secretariat to conduct such contingency operations in line with the Convention in response to concerns over possible non-compliance with it, while neither CIs nor IAUs have been requested by any State Party since the Convention's entry into force in 1997.
6. These practical realities notwithstanding, the Secretariat has continued to deepen its knowledge and expertise to conduct all types of contingency operations, and to respond to requests by States Parties for assistance, protection, and any other type of investigation pursuant to the Convention. Maintaining and improving the capacity to conduct these operations remains a priority for the Secretariat. As such, the Office of Special Missions has been created to ensure the Secretariat's readiness to respond in the event of a request by a State Party in relation to the use or threat of use of toxic chemicals as weapons. This structure responds to the evolving security landscape and increasingly complex operational demands of the Secretariat, and ensures that contingency operations are supported by structures capable of agile coordination and sustained readiness.
7. This Note concentrates on the activities the Secretariat has undertaken since the last update (EC-106/DG.17, dated 2 July 2024), and highlights issues that still require further consideration and attention by States Parties and by the Secretariat.

Organisational structure to respond to CI and IAU requests

8. The Secretariat currently has assigned staff members from the Inspectorate Division to plan and coordinate the implementation of 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 contingency missions, including CIs, IAUs, and technical assistance visits (TAVs) in accordance with Articles VIII, IX and X of the Convention or any mandates received from the policy-making organs.
9. In addition, as reported in the Note by the Secretariat entitled "Estimated Costs of OPCW Mandated Activities to Resolve the Remaining Issues Surrounding the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme" (S/2397/2025, dated 29 April 2025), the Office of Special Missions has been created to organise and conduct all OPCW contingency operations, including in the Syrian Arab Republic and beyond.
10. The Office of Special Missions will be composed of a core group of staff members and will coordinate with all relevant units in the Secretariat, including the Inspectorate, International Cooperation and Assistance, and Verification Divisions, as well as with States Parties, as required.
11. To actively monitor ongoing missions, including in case of CIs and IAUs, the Situation Centre (SitCen) provides 24-hour, real-time mission support to deployed teams. The SitCen maintains the capability to provide an initial analysis, a comprehensive common operating picture, secure and reliable communications, and up-to-date information and analyses to facilitate senior management's decision-making.

Operational procedures and training of inspectors

12. During the reporting period, Inspectorate training programmes continued to maintain the mandatory requirements under the Quality Management System for the conduct of inspection activities, and for the preparation of inspectors to perform inspection duties for CIs and IAUs and other non-routine missions.
13. 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 all types of non-routine missions.
14. Throughout the reporting period, various training components, including initial inspector training, certifications, recertifications, and general and specialised training were delivered. The training programme involved relevant Secretariat staff members, including from the Inspectorate.
15. Listed below are relevant training components pertaining to the conduct of CIs and IAUs:
 - (a) Initial inspector training: 11 new Inspectors completed their mandatory training, cross-training, and certifications to conduct both routine and non-routine missions, including CIs and IAUs .
 - (b) Toxic chemical training (TCT): TCT is mandatory for inspectors and select Secretariat staff who may potentially work in environments where chemical warfare agents are present. 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 was held in Slovakia in October 2024 (15 participants), and a second TCT took place in Serbia in March 2025 (10 participants).
 - (c) Schedule 1 chemistry: This training component provided theoretical knowledge about the chemistry of Schedule 1 chemicals, including their physical and chemical properties, synthesis routes, decontamination, toxicological properties, and degradation pathways. Eleven inspectors were either certified or recertified during this mandatory course in October 2024 in The Hague.

Specialised training and exercises

16. Specialised training is aimed at enhancing inspectors' individual skills following initial inspector training. This training is coordinated and organised internally by the Inspectorate Division in collaboration with other Secretariat units, 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 capabilities and overall preparedness.

17. Listed below are the relevant specialised training and exercises conducted during the reporting period:
- (a) Self-contained breathing apparatus accreditation: This accreditation provided inspectors with the qualifications needed to operate with a self-contained breathing apparatus, which is fundamental for operating in confined environments. Eight inspectors participated in this training, which was conducted at the Joint Fire Brigade Training Centre in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in December 2024.
 - (b) Mobile laboratory deployment exercise: A specialised mobile laboratory deployment exercise was conducted with the aim of practising the set-up and operation of an on-site laboratory. The exercise included setting up instrumentation and sample processing equipment, conducting sample preparation, chemical analysis, and data interpretation. The training exercise was conducted with 10 participants in December 2024 at the Training and Testing Facility in Vyskov, the Czech Republic.
 - (c) OPCW non-destructive evaluation testing level 1 recertification training: Specialised theoretical and practical ultrasound and radiographic training was conducted at the MME Group in Heijningen, the Netherlands, in April 2025 for a total of four inspectors.
 - (d) Analytical chemistry inspector certification: This certification course dealt 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. Training was provided to five inspectors at the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) in January 2025. Additionally, during the reporting period, two analytical chemist inspectors completed their recertification to maintain their operational status.
 - (e) Investigative interview skills training: This training, held at the United Nations Office in Geneva in September 2024 was aimed at enhancing interview skills. The training consisted of a blend of theory and role-playing exercises relevant to the conduct of non-routine missions.
 - (f) Advanced TCT: This training was comprised of complex CI and IAU scenarios where proper reconnaissance, sampling, and chain-of-custody techniques were practised and evaluated in a live-agent environment. This advanced TCT for 13 inspectors took place in Slovakia in May 2025.
 - (g) IAU and CI introductory training: This internal training provided introductory knowledge on the legal framework, OPCW standard operating procedures, and OPCW operational work instructions for conducting a CI or an IAU. The training was delivered to 11 inspectors and staff members in March 2025.
 - (h) CI and IAU workshop: This training built on the introductory sessions, where the practical aspects were addressed. The training was delivered to 16 participants in December 2024.

- (i) Diplomatic negotiations course: This course, sponsored by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, provided the skills necessary to conduct complex negotiations through both theory and challenging role-playing scenarios. The course was delivered in April 2025 in The Hague to 18 inspectors.
 - (j) Command and control for deployed missions: This course, sponsored by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, provided the skills necessary to plan and integrate several units and relevant stakeholders in the case of a chemical event through both theory and challenging role playing. The course was attended by nine inspectors at the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) Centre in Ryton, United Kingdom in June 2024.
 - (k) Bullet wound kit awareness course: This internal training was a pilot initiative within the Inspectorate Division to create awareness of the use of the bullet wound kit. This training was delivered at the ChemTech Centre and attended by 12 participants in April 2025.
18. The Secretariat greatly appreciates the support for training opportunities in 2024 and 2025 provided by Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

Equipment and laboratories

19. Since last year's report (EC-106/DG.17), 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 Conference). The Secretariat informed the States Parties of the newly procured items of approved equipment through Notes S/2315/2024 (dated 14 August 2024), S/2334/2024 (dated 5 November 2024), and S/2395/2025 (dated 23 April 2025).
20. The OPCW Technology and Training Hub at the ChemTech Centre continues to maintain necessary supplies and equipment, to support a CI or IAU team deployment within the time frames specified in the Convention, or to meet other short-notice operational and/or legal requirements.
21. The Secretariat maintains two mechanisms for the analysis of samples collected in support of a CI, an IAU, or other contingency and/or non-routine mission: a deployable laboratory for on-site analysis operated by the Inspectorate, and a network of designated laboratories available to conduct the off-site analysis of samples. The list of designated laboratories is updated following each round of proficiency testing. The current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic environmental samples can be found in Note S/2386/2025 (dated 21 March 2025), while the current list of laboratories designated for the analysis of authentic biomedical samples can be found in Note S/2313/2024 (dated 12 August 2024).

Issues requiring further action by the SecretariatExercises

22. The planning and conduct of exercises are essential to ensuring and strengthening a response to all contingencies related to the threat of use of toxic chemicals as weapons. An advanced TCT was conducted in May 2025, in which complex CI/IAU scenarios were practised and evaluated in a live-agent environment. The Secretariat will use the lessons learned from these exercises to further improve its procedures and will continue to plan exercises.

Issues requiring further action by States Parties

23. As mentioned in previous reports, the ability of the OPCW to respond promptly to requests for a CI or an IAU or other types of contingency or non-routine missions 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 (the Verification Annex). These are 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 2025, 144 States Parties (75%) 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); 29 States Parties (15%) had issued multiple-entry visas valid for one year (or less); and 20 States Parties (10%) 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 to recall 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 at 31 May 2025, 142 States Parties had provided information regarding points of entry, whereas 51 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 at 31 May 2025, 51 States Parties had provided SDCNs on a permanent basis, while 28 had provided information on expediting them if a requirement arises. 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 at 31 May 2025, 86 States Parties had provided frequencies or had given the Secretariat authorisation to use OPCW default frequencies, and/or had provided conditions for the use of said frequencies, or had confirmed or provided information on an expedited method for obtaining the necessary frequencies in 2025. As at the same date, 107 States Parties had not provided any records regarding radio frequencies.
24. Bilateral agreements should be further pursued between States Parties and the Secretariat for the provision of independent air transport at 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. It should also be noted that such agreements could be beneficial to the proper and timely deployment of equipment in case of upcoming foreseen destruction and verification-related activities in the Syrian Arab Republic in relation to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme (S/2413/2025, dated 5 June 2025). This is crucial in the event of limitations being imposed on commercial transport, such as in areas of conflict.
25. The Secretariat continues to encourage States Parties to jointly organise and host exercises and training, or to provide training venues that can enhance the Organisation's investigative and response capabilities, specifically for inspectors and relevant Secretariat staff required for CIs or IAUs.
26. 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

27. During the reporting period, the Secretariat maintained its readiness to conduct CIs, IAUs, TAVs, and to respond to requests by States Parties for assistance, protection, and any other type of investigation pursuant to the Convention. The Secretariat has been adapting to all chemical threats and complex environments which were not envisaged when the Convention was drafted, by conducting further relevant training, planning exercises, and exploring novel technologies with the support and cooperation of States Parties. The Office of Special Missions contributes to this effort by organising, coordinating, and undertaking these kinds of deployments in the Syrian Arab Republic and beyond, as mandated by the policy-making organs. As such, the Office of Special Missions will require personnel possessing the highest level of skills, expertise, and knowledge that will ensure the Secretariat's ability to deliver on its mandated activities.
28. As highlighted in the Addendum to the Director-General's report on the implementation of the tenure policy in 2023 (EC-106/DG.8/Add.1 C-29/DG.4/Add.1, dated 3 October 2024), the recruitment of new inspectors based on a tenure policy with a maximum of seven years continues to create challenges when planning and balancing technical specialities 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 the transfer of knowledge. As conducting CI, IAU, and other contingency missions requires exceptional support from various units within the Secretariat, similar institutional knowledge is deemed instrumental for the success of these missions. The impact of the tenure policy is felt broadly within the Secretariat, as it has a direct effect on succession planning, as well as the OPCW's capacity and readiness to deliver on its mandates.

29. In its decision on the rehiring of inspectors (C-29/DEC.8, dated 25 November 2024), the Conference authorised the Director-General to rehire individuals who have previously been designated as OPCW inspectors. This has allowed for the rehiring of inspectors with strong performance records who have been actively engaged in strengthening the Secretariat's readiness to conduct contingency operations. The rehiring of inspectors has had a noticeable positive impact on the effectiveness of the work of the OPCW, mainly through a broader initiative to share knowledge, skills, and expertise, inter alia, in preparedness for contingency operations.
30. With a view to maintaining and potentially expanding the rehiring capacity of the Secretariat beyond the body of inspectors alone, in particular when addressing its capacity and readiness to conduct contingency operations, the Director-General has received the authority to designate, on an exceptional basis, any fixed-term position subject to tenure as eligible for rehiring for another seven-year term (EC-108/DEC.4, dated 6 March 2025).
31. The Secretariat reiterates its appreciation for the assistance that States Parties have contributed thus far and encourages their continuing support.

--- 0 ---