



111th Session
10 – 13 March 2026

EC-111/DG.15
10 March 2026
Original: ENGLISH

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 111TH SESSION

1. I welcome all delegations to the 111th Session of the Executive Council.
2. I thank the Chairperson of the Council, Ambassador Thomas Schieb, Permanent Representative of Germany to the OPCW, for his continued able stewardship.
3. The rules-based global order and international disarmament and arms control framework continue to be under pressure. It is the joint responsibility of the States Parties and the Secretariat to safeguard the integrity of the Convention, and to take robust measures against any non-compliance. Doing so will ensure the continued success and relevance of the Organisation. For its part, the Secretariat stands ready to assist all States Parties in implementing their obligations under the Convention and to respond to their requests, as it has been doing for many years. During the intersessional period, we continued to deliver on all our mandates.
4. The task of eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its remnants rests at the very core of the Convention. This remains the most complex and resource intensive file in the Organisation. The Syrian Arab Republic has informed the States Parties that it has neither the resources nor the expertise to fulfil this task by itself, in line with its obligations. The Secretariat agrees with the Syrian authorities and has also emphasised this point in various notes and reports over the course of the past year. I recall my letter to the Council on 6 November 2025 (L/ODG-769/25) which includes a non-exhaustive list of needs and gaps outlining what the Syrian Arab Republic must provide and the estimated capacity it has at its disposal. The task in the Syrian Arab Republic can only be accomplished collectively, with the active participation of the Syrian authorities, the States Parties and the Secretariat. Of the 26 outstanding issues identified in the Syrian declarations and reported by the Secretariat since 2014, only 7 have been resolved. The remaining 19 outstanding issues are still pending resolution. I recall that these issues involve large quantities of potentially undeclared and/or unverified chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions. Over 100 locations may have been involved in activities related to the Syrian chemical weapons programme. These locations need to be visited, assessed, possibly declared, and verifiably destroyed as appropriate. Since March 2025, the Secretariat has visited 20 locations, several of them more than once. It has interviewed various chemical weapons experts associated with the chemical weapons programme and collected 19 samples. Roughly 6,000 documents were collected by the Secretariat from the locations visited in 2025. In addition, on 15 January 2026, the Syrian National Authority handed over to the Secretariat team in Damascus 34 sealed cardboard boxes, containing tens of thousands of documents amounting to more than 50,000 pages.



All these documents have been scanned and are being analysed by OPCW experts. Based on the information gathered through the Secretariat's deployments in 2025, at least two locations visited by the Secretariat could be declarable under the Convention.

5. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by this file, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Secretariat have made good progress. At the Council's last session, I briefed you on the conclusion in June 2025 of a new agreement with the Syrian authorities on the privileges and immunities of the OPCW and its personnel when deployed in the Syrian Arab Republic. Moreover, in response to my letter of 23 October 2025, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic informed me, on 26 October, of the establishment of a new Syrian National Authority. In October 2025, the Secretariat re-established a continuous presence in Syria. The Syrian authorities have supported us in securing accommodation and office space that meet United Nations safety and security standards. On 20 November 2025, I received the new Ambassador Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW for the presentation of his credentials. This progress has been achieved while facing significant obstacles. We understand the difficult situation in which the Syrian Arab Republic finds itself, as a consequence of the extremely problematic legacy the new authorities have inherited. The Secretariat will continue to implement its verification and assistance role, making full use of the flexibility provided for under the Convention.
6. Since the re-establishment of a continuous presence in Damascus in October 2025, the Secretariat has been regularly rotating multidisciplinary teams of experts in the Syrian Arab Republic, through its Office of Special Missions (OSM). We have obtained additional information that further supports our previous conclusions, that the former Syrian regime withheld information on the extent of its chemical weapons programme. In November 2025 and January 2026, OSM teams, working jointly with Syrian counterparts, visited eight undeclared locations identified as potentially related to the former chemical weapons programme. During these visits, a total of 15 samples were collected from three locations. One of these locations had previously been visited in August 2025, at which time one sample tested positive for the presence of a chemical warfare agent, as well as its degradation and hydrolysis products. To clarify this finding, four additional samples were collected at the same location during the January 2026 visit. These samples will be analysed at OPCW designated laboratories and results will be communicated to the Syrian National Authority and to the Council in due course. In addition, the analysis of samples collected at a separate location visited in November 2025 revealed indicators of chemical warfare nerve agents. The Secretariat will continue its work to define the full scope of chemical weapons-related activities at the locations already visited by the Organisation's experts and will continue visiting other locations as well.
7. In January 2026, following information received through interviews with chemical weapons experts from the former Syrian National Authority, the Secretariat visited a military base in the Aleppo area. The purpose was to assess undeclared storage containers for chemical precursors, and 75 undeclared cylinders that could be declared as chemical weapons. The Secretariat had been engaged with the Syrian National Authority on the planning of this visit since this information was shared in August 2025 by chemical weapons experts of the Assad regime. The conduct of this visit was contingent upon the provision of additional information, including necessary conditions for a safe deployment. In 2025, as security was not guaranteed, the Syrian authorities

and the Secretariat agreed to postpone the visit to this location. Prior to the visit, the Secretariat advised the Syrian National Authority to safeguard the undeclared items at their original location, as some of these items could be considered declarable as chemical weapons. On 4 January 2026, the Secretariat received a note verbale from the Permanent Representation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW providing the requested information for a safe deployment to be conducted. The visit took place between 27 and 29 January 2026, when all the conditions were deemed to have been met. Upon arriving at the military base on 27 January 2026, the Secretariat observed 14 large-volume storage containers. The containers were empty and, the following day, the Secretariat team collected eight samples from these containers. Upon the Secretariat team's arrival at the location, accompanied by the Syrian National Authority and in the presence of the Brigadier General Chief of the Military Base, officials from the Syrian National Authority reported that the 75 cylinders that had been expected to be inside the military base were no longer there, and that they were not aware of their whereabouts. On the next day, 28 January 2026, the Syrian authorities stated that the cylinders had been removed on 24 December 2025 and had reportedly been destroyed at a local scrapyard. On 29 January 2026, the Secretariat team visited the scrapyard and observed components that may have been part of the gas cylinders. The Syrian National Authority further informed the Secretariat that it had launched an investigation to determine the fate of the said cylinders. Considering the seriousness of the situation, on 28 January 2026, the Secretariat transmitted a note verbale (NV/ODG-793/26) to the Permanent Representation of the Syrian Arab Republic, which referred to the deployment to the location of the cylinders, and the fact that the cylinders were no longer where they had been expected to be, as they had been reportedly destroyed. The decision of the Executive Council entitled "Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons" (EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013), which was adopted when the Syrian Arab Republic joined the Convention, states that the Secretariat shall make available to all States Parties any information referred to this decision. Consequently, the Secretariat had the obligation to share the said note verbale with all States Parties, which it did on 4 February. The note was circulated to all States Parties, in line with what I have continuously done since I began my duties as Director-General, that is, respecting the rules, working with transparency and doing my best to provide all information to the Permanent Representations to facilitate their work. On 25 February, the Secretariat received a note verbale from the Permanent Representation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW dated 23 February, providing additional information on this matter. The Syrian National Authority has undertaken to investigate this matter and to share the outcome of its investigation with the Secretariat in due course. Further details on declaration-related activities conducted under the OSM were provided during the briefing held on 4 March 2026 and in the Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team, under the Office of Special Missions, issued on 9 March 2026 (EC-111/HP/DG.1, dated 9 March 2026).

8. Through the Fact-Finding Mission, in November 2025, the Secretariat continued its activities in the Syrian Arab Republic to establish the facts surrounding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. The teams conducted interviews in relation to allegations under investigation, held meetings with the Syrian National Authority, and continued planning future activities, including visits to incident locations in coordination with Syrian counterparts. In December 2025, as part of its field activities, the team conducted a site visit to a location associated with one of the allegations in the Aleppo area. During this visit, the team documented the location and collected samples

and other items of potential value. Through notes verbales, the Secretariat requested additional information regarding the device allegedly linked to an incident that occurred at Tallet al-Kbayneh on 19 May 2019, as well as documentation pertaining to military locations, including logs, reports, and flight records, that may be relevant to ongoing investigations. Further details were shared in the Secretariat's Note S/2473/2025 (dated 24 December 2025). The Secretariat continues its analysis of information pertaining to reported incidents and, in due course, will issue a report covering five groups of allegations encompassing a total of 16 reported incidents.

9. The Secretariat has also made progress in relation to its mandate to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 22 January 2026, the Secretariat published its report on the incident that occurred in Kafr Zeita, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 1 October 2016 (issued as S/2478/2026, dated 21 January 2026). The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) conducted a comprehensive investigation between March 2024 and December 2025 and reached its conclusions, on the basis of the standard of proof of "reasonable grounds." Based on all information obtained, analysed, and corroborated, the IIT determined, that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, on 1 October 2016 (between 19:00 and 19:40) (UTC+3), an Mi-8/17 helicopter operated under the control of the Tiger Forces of the Syrian Arab Air Force dropped at least one yellow pressurised cylinder that struck a cave system in the Wadi al-Aanz Valley in Kafr Zeita. The conclusion is that 35 individuals were injured and dozens more affected. This was the fifth report of the IIT relating to the seventh incident it investigated, and further demonstrates a pattern of use of chemical weapons by the previous Syrian authorities. The Secretariat welcomes the commitment and relevant cooperation of the new Syrian authorities, including the provision of access to Syrian territory and of relevant information and primary documentation related to the incident. In accordance with the decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties at its Fourth Special Session on 27 June 2018 entitled "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use" (C-SS-4/DEC.3), the Secretariat transmitted the report to the Executive Council and to the United Nations Secretary-General for their consideration. The Secretariat continues to implement the mandate related to identifying the perpetrators of use of chemical weapons under the OSM, by investigating incidents in which it has been determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used. In addition, I wish to inform you that, to date, we have seven staff members in Damascus who will remain there in the United Nations vetted accommodations, until movements are safe enough for them to travel back to the Netherlands.
10. In relation to Ukraine, the war is now entering its fifth year. The number of allegations of chemical weapons use on both sides continues to grow. At the request of Ukraine pursuant to subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention, the Secretariat continues to provide sustained technical assistance to Ukraine, to strengthen national capacity to face possible chemical incidents. To date, the Secretariat has conducted three technical assistance visits (TAVs) to Ukraine. The corresponding reports have been made available on the OPCW public website, at the request of Ukraine. They confirm the presence of CS, a riot control agent, in samples collected on the battlefield, in several instances. As you know, the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare is prohibited under paragraph 5 of Article I of the Convention. The Secretariat remains in discussions with Ukraine, following its request to the Director-General, to consider further steps in supporting Ukrainian investigations. In accordance with paragraph 1 of Article VII of the Convention, all States Parties are required to adopt national measures to implement the

Convention, including the capacity to conduct national investigations of alleged use of chemicals as weapons. I recall Conference decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, which in its paragraph 10 tasks the Secretariat with putting in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In paragraph 19 of that decision, the Conference underscored the added value of the Secretariat conducting an independent investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons with a view to facilitating universal attribution of all chemical weapons attacks. I emphasise that this added value is a principle. It does not task the Secretariat, as in paragraph 10 concerning the Syrian Arab Republic, with putting in place arrangements to identify perpetrators in any other State Party. The setting up of an independent system for identifying perpetrators in countries other than the Syrian Arab Republic is a decision for the OPCW policy-making organs, to be determined on a case-by-case basis. In paragraph 20 of the aforementioned decision, the Conference decided that the Secretariat may, upon request, provide technical expertise to assist a State Party investigating possible chemical weapons use on its territory. We continue to extend support to Ukraine upon its request in line with that decision.

11. The Secretariat has also continued to deliver support to Ukraine, upon its request, in the field of assistance and protection under Article X of the Convention. These measures directly contribute to improving the safety of first responders, and to strengthening evidence-collection capacities in accordance with OPCW international standards. These activities were made possible through voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund on Assistance and Protection for Ukraine under Article X. Of the EUR 8.2 million received in the Trust Fund, an amount of EUR 3.4 million has been spent, with a remaining balance of EUR 4.8 million.
12. The Secretariat has also continued to engage with the Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation, following its request for a TAV under subparagraph 38(e) of Article VIII, submitted by note verbale on 7 July 2025. Since my last report to the Council, the Secretariat continued exchanges with the Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation to clarify legal and technical aspects related to its request. In November 2025, the Secretariat held consultations with the Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation to continue addressing outstanding issues and the way forward. We will continue to keep this Council apprised of developments.
13. In relation to Gaza, we have continued our engagement with the Permanent Representation of the State of Palestine in The Hague, upon its request for assistance. The request concerned the provision of training to strengthen its capacity in responding to incidents involving toxic chemicals. The Secretariat remains ready to provide additional trainings tailored to the specific needs identified by the State of Palestine.
14. We continue to closely monitor the developments in the Sudan through the Situation Centre. The allegations of use of chemical weapons in the context of the civil war are of serious concern. All correspondence on this matter has been shared with States Parties via Catalyst. The parties have engaged in dialogue under the direct purview of the Council, in accordance with Article IX of the Convention. To date, we have not received any sufficiently substantiated request for additional activities. I reiterate that the Secretariat has no authority to act on its own initiative in situations such as this. Accordingly, the matter remains in the hands of the States Parties, under the purview of the Council.

15. More recently, by letter addressed to me dated 14 February 2026, the Governments of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland shared with me a joint statement by their foreign ministries, also dated 14 February 2026. The statement conveys the conclusion of their national investigations that Mr Alexei Navalny was poisoned with epibatidine, a lethal toxin, based on analyses of samples recovered from his remains. On 2 March 2026, I responded to this letter, stating that any use of a toxic chemical for its toxic properties to kill or harm people, regardless of its origin or method of production, is considered a chemical weapon under the Chemical Weapons Convention (subparagraph 1(a) of Article II and paragraph 2 of Article II). In other words, it is irrelevant whether the chemical reportedly used to kill or harm people is biologically generated or synthesised in a laboratory, as in both cases such prohibited use falls under Article II of the Convention. Both letters and the statement have been shared with all States Parties via Catalyst. The notes verbales of the Russian Federations, dated 16 and 24 February and 5 March 2026, have also been circulated to all States Parties via Catalyst.
16. The toxin reportedly identified, known as epibatidine, initially comes from a frog native to South and Central America. When the frog is removed from its environment, it stops producing the toxin. This toxin can and has been synthetically produced in laboratories since the 1990s, in attempts to discover new sorts of painkillers. However, research was abandoned as the toxicity was too high and its margin of safety too low (namely, a high risk of overdose), as the adequate doses are difficult to control. Additionally, the medical use of epibatidine is too restricted to be financially and commercially profitable. Its toxicity is higher than that of VX, a Schedule 1 chemical weapon. If produced in a laboratory, it is a toxic chemical. If taken from the frog itself, it is a biotoxin. Biotoxins are not new under the Convention. Two of the most toxic existing substances are ricin and saxitoxin. Both are biologically generated and, as such, are classified as biotoxins, and both are included in Schedule 1 of the Convention. In any event, any use of a toxic chemical to kill or harm people through its toxic properties is considered a chemical weapon. Subsequently, any toxin used for this purpose should be dealt with by the Secretariat and the policy-making organs of the Organisation. The fact that the use of epibatidine is covered under the Chemical Weapons Convention does not preclude it from also being dealt with under the Biological Weapons Convention. On 24 February 2026, the Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation shared an additional note verbale related to the incidents of chemical weapons use in Salisbury and Amesbury. Upon request, the Secretariat made the note available to States Parties. These matters are for the States Parties and this Council to address.
17. The Secretariat remains alert to the misuse of new and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and drones, or uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs). Regarding new technologies, as you know in December 2024 I established a Temporary Working Group on AI under the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). The Group has been working for over a year and produced a report that has already been uploaded on the SAB page of the OPCW website and, consequently, is at the disposal of all of you. The report still requires formal adoption by the SAB, and subsequently my endorsement. It is important that the information contained in this report be made available to States Parties for your consideration and as a basis for further discussion. It is a relevant document, with up-to-date information about AI use for automated and remote laboratories; data creation and reliability; AI governance; molecular property prediction; and simulation

and training, among other matters. I hope that you will find it useful. The Temporary Working Group on Chemical Forensics also completed its mandate at the end of 2025 and is preparing its final report, which is expected to be issued next month.

18. The Secretariat continues to closely monitor technological developments related to UAVs, such as drones, to assess the impact of this technology on the implementation of the Convention. The initial focus is on exploring drone capabilities that can strengthen monitoring, verification, and emergency response. At the same time, we are also addressing the potential misuse of such technology by non-State actors for the delivery or dispersal of toxic chemicals. As part of this effort, the Secretariat is preparing a technical workshop with external experts who will evaluate the threats and risks as well as the potential benefits of this technology, while also examining gaps in existing legal and policy frameworks. The goal is to share knowledge through discussions, scenario evaluations, and demonstrations of UAV technology, that will assist us in raising awareness of the dual-use nature of drones (UAVs) and associated technologies in the context of the Convention.
19. The Secretariat is simultaneously delivering on its routine tasks in chemical demilitarisation, non-proliferation, and prevention.
20. The fourth and final visit to the Blue Grass chemical weapons destruction facility and its non-contiguous sites in the United States of America took place last October. During the visit, the disposal of chemical weapons component wastes was verified, marking the successful completion of an additional stage in the destruction.
21. China and Japan have continued bilateral consultations on the ongoing excavation, recovery, and destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China. As of 31 January 2026, a total of 149,378 of the 174,417 declared items of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW) had been reported by Japan as destroyed and verified by the Secretariat. The Secretariat conducted seven ACW inspections in China during the intersessional period. In October 2025, a trilateral meeting was conducted, during which China, Japan, and the Secretariat discussed the progress of the destruction and recovery activities and the plan for 2026. I must underline that until all abandoned chemical weapons in China have been recovered and destroyed, we must not say that the period of destruction of chemical weapons in this Organisation has come to an end.
22. Concerning old chemical weapons, during the intersessional period the Secretariat conducted inspections in Belgium, France, Germany, and the United States of America.
23. Regarding the implementation of Article V, the Secretariat also conducted two inspections at former chemical weapons production facilities converted for purposes not prohibited by the Convention: one in the Russian Federation and the other in Iraq. Both inspections were conducted under the Council decision establishing verification measures at converted facilities 10 years after their conversion (EC-67/DEC.7, dated 16 February 2012).
24. Regarding the implementation of Article VI related to chemical industry inspections, the Secretariat, working in close cooperation with States Parties, achieved the mandated target for industry inspections in 2025. In total, 200 inspections were carried out across 39 States Parties, covering 11 Schedule 1 facilities, 49 Schedule 2 facilities, 10 Schedule 3 facilities, and 130 other chemical production facilities (OCPFs).

A total of 210 Article VI inspections are planned for 2026, and a total of 241 for 2027. Since the session of the Council last October, the Secretariat has completed a total of 91 chemical industry inspections. Of these, 46 inspections were conducted by the end of 2025, comprising 10 Schedule 2, two Schedule 3, and 34 OCPF inspections, thereby enabling the successful completion of the 2025 inspection plan.

25. Considering the increasingly degraded global safety and security environment, increasing travel and mission costs, as well as operational restrictions in several States Parties, the Secretariat is facing challenges to the efficient and effective implementation, inter alia, of the Article VI chemical industry inspection plan for 2026. Should these conditions persist, the full implementation of the Article VI inspection plan may not be feasible. Under these circumstances, enhanced cooperation, flexibility and support by the States Parties remain critical. The Secretariat continues to accord the highest priority to the full execution of its mandate under Article VI. These degraded conditions may also have an overall impact on other mandated activities of the Secretariat.
26. We continue to integrate emerging technologies into the Secretariat's inspection operations to enhance our preparedness for all types of missions in an increasingly demanding technological and international security context. A relevant example is the introduction in 2025 of an AI-supported horizon-scanning platform at the Technology and Training Hub of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre). With this instrument we will be able to test and validate different technologies and new equipment of all kinds, which may be potentially useful for us under the project on "the development of test and validation capabilities for technology". This platform can monitor and analyse validated scientific and technology-related publications, patent submissions, and news on relevant technological trends. The Secretariat will continue to expand the capabilities of the ChemTech Centre to support our technology validation efforts in 2026. Our work integrating virtual reality training modules and equipment in our inspection operations also continues.
27. During the intersessional period, 30 training courses, of which 13 took place at the ChemTech Centre, were organised for the staff conducting industry inspections to ensure they maintain the highest standards of expertise. A total of 151 trainees attended these activities for a combined 1,039 training days, of which 984 involved inspector training days. During the same period, a total of 53 inspectors participated in at least one training course.
28. I underscore that national implementation of the Convention, as well as the capacity to protect citizens from chemical incidents, remains the most effective preventive measure for all States Parties. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat delivered a total of 36 capacity-building events for States Parties' experts. Six of these events were conducted at the ChemTech Centre, benefitting participants from all regions, who joined both on-site and remotely. Additionally, in November, I was pleased to welcome over 200 delegates from 141 Member States here at the OPCW Main Building for the Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of National Authorities. Discussions prioritised emerging technologies, including AI, assistance and protection-related capacity-building activities, and best practices on preventing illicit transfers of chemicals. In the area of assistance and protection, the Secretariat continues to support Member States in their development of effective national protection plans and first-response capabilities against chemical attacks and incidents. In January this year,

we welcomed the first participant in the Biotoxin Research Fellowship Programme for African Member States, under Article XI, at the ChemTech Centre. This participant is undertaking biotoxin-related research led by the OPCW Laboratory, while receiving six months of on-the-job training.

29. Delivering to high standards requires sound human, financial, and operational resources. Looking broadly across the multilateral system, we have entered a period of severe fiscal constraints, reflecting the financial challenges faced by many States Parties. Such cycles are not new, but this one is particularly acute, as we have to consider that it is accompanied by a growing scepticism among some stakeholders regarding the ability of international organisations to deliver on their mandates. I underline this Organisation's strong record in delivering on its mandates, ensuring that the resources contributed by the States Parties are efficiently, and effectively, utilised. Each year, our strong management in this area is recognised by the concrete results of our work, in the findings of the External Auditors, and in the encouraging assessments of the Council's Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF).
30. In this vein, I encourage those States Parties that have not yet remitted their 2026 assessed contributions to do so, as soon as possible, in order not to jeopardise our operations. In December 2025, following approval of the Biennium Programme and Budget for 2026-2027, the Secretariat issued annual assessment letters to States Parties for 2026. Last year, late remittances necessitated a drawdown of EUR 3.0 million from the Working Capital Fund, with a further drawdown in November being narrowly avoided. The Financial Regulations require that assessed contributions be submitted within 30 days of receipt of the assessment letter.
31. Turning to the security priorities of the Secretariat, several measures have already been implemented since the intrusion into the OPCW Main Building of a violent group of people on 3 December 2021. Namely, these include new garage doors, enhanced access controls on secure floors, and security upgrades to the lobby. The remaining physical security requirements will ensure full compliance with the United Nations minimum security standards. They consist of upgrades to the Front Guard House, main gates, the perimeter fence, and intrusion detection capabilities. The required EUR 6 million investment for this purpose has now been fully financed, mainly through reallocation of cash surpluses and a EUR 1 million pledged contribution from the Host Country. The project is under way, and the start of actual construction works is foreseen for the end of 2026 and will be aligned with operational activities at the Main Building.
32. Another challenge the Secretariat continues to address relates to cybersecurity. The cyber threat level remains high, and the Secretariat continues to be targeted by both, generic, as well as sophisticated, and highly tailored cyberattacks. Since the Council's last session, we have detected and blocked over 17,000 potentially malicious incoming emails, as a result of anti-spam and anti-phishing policies and settings. For instance, one advanced malware campaign was detected and subsequently blocked. Such advanced campaigns are highly targeted and actively try to identify and exploit system and human vulnerabilities to gain access to OPCW information. If successful, such campaigns could take full control of OPCW information systems, disable OPCW operations, or access confidential information. We continue to train our staff in relation to information security and confidentiality, to create and maintain high levels of awareness and accountability of individuals while discharging their official duties.

33. I am pleased to point to a more positive infrastructure development. This session of the Council marks the first use of the newly upgraded conference facilities. As you can see, we have replaced the old and outdated conferencing system with a modern, fully integrated solution, which provides reliable, secure, and high-quality capabilities. With the new integrated system, the Ieper and Ooms Rooms and Delegates' Lounge now function as one environment. Delegates benefit from synchronised audio, video, and interpretation facilities, regardless of where they are seated, with the added benefit of interaction features in the Ooms Room. With the integration of the Ooms Room, we can now accommodate up to 118 delegations, representing a 45% capacity increase. Delegates now have the possibility of delivering their statements from the Ooms Room during the Council sessions. This will allow them to participate on equal footing with those seated in Ieper Room.

34. In closing, for many years now, we have witnessed the dismantling of the post-1945 international rules-based order as we know it. This is the reality in which the OPCW is operating. Yet the OPCW continues to deliver with concrete results. Our ongoing success depends on the active participation of every State Party in upholding the full implementation of the Convention. The decision-making and guiding role of the policy-making organs has never been more crucial. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

--- 0 ---