



NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

UPDATE ON THE SECURE INFORMATION EXCHANGE SYSTEM

Introduction

1. Timeliness of exchange of information between the States Parties and the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) is crucial for the effective and efficient implementation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”).
2. The traditional way of exchanging classified information, through diplomatic pouch, imposes logistical difficulties. These can cause delays and may, therefore, adversely impact the timely fulfilment by the States Parties of their obligations under the Convention, such as the timely submission of declarations. This may also have repercussions for important activities carried out by the Secretariat, such as the evaluation of declarations and the planning of inspections.
3. To address this issue, the Secretariat has designed and put in place a system for the secure electronic transmission of classified documents, known as the secure information exchange (SIX) system, in accordance with the Note by the Secretariat on this subject (S/1192/2014, dated 1 July 2014).
4. The present Note describes the current status of the SIX system and the priorities for the future of this critical communication mechanism. A previous update was provided to the States Parties last year (S/1327/2015, dated 13 November 2015).

Overview of system utilisation

5. Since its launch in July 2014, 36 States Parties have registered for the SIX system, resulting in authorisation for 60 individual users to use the system. An up-to-date list of registered States Parties is maintained on the dedicated section of the OPCW external server.¹
6. States Parties from all OPCW regional groups are represented amongst the users, with 36% from the Western Europe and Other Countries group, 22% from Eastern Europe, 17% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 22% from Asia, and 3% from Africa.

¹ See the “SIX Documents” link on the left-hand side of the OPCW external server home page.



7. The number of registered States Parties has been growing steadily since the system launch. The highest increases in the number of newly registered States Parties have been observed in the periods when States Parties are preparing and submitting annual declarations, such as in the first quarter of 2015 and 2016. As a result, the number of annual declarations on past activities received using the SIX system has increased by 107%, from 15 in 2015 to 31 in 2016. Out of 31 declarations received, all but one were on time. Fifty percent of these were submitted within the last two days before the deadline, while the remaining 50% were submitted earlier. Therefore, the States Parties that used SIX were able to dedicate more time to the preparation of the declarations without having to worry about the logistics of transmission.
8. Overall, the Secretariat has so far received 217 documents from States Parties through SIX. The majority of these documents were annual declarations of past and anticipated activities, as well as amendments to previously submitted declarations under Article VI of the Convention. In addition, other types of documents have been received, such as declarations under other articles (Article III or Article X, for example), responses to official letters from the Secretariat, and operational documents related to the SIX system itself.
9. For submission of documents from the Secretariat to the States Parties, in addition to the reconciliation letters, the system is increasingly being used for final inspection reports. It is also important to note that several States Parties recently expressed an interest in moving to paperless communication with the Secretariat for confidential information, where possible.

Current and future activities

10. The majority of the Secretariat's activities since the system was launched have focused on providing support to the States Parties in regard to registering and using the system and on promotion of the system amongst the States Parties. Presentation and demonstration of the SIX system have been part of the training courses organised for National Authorities. In addition, the e-learning module "Introduction to SIX", which was introduced in 2015 in English only, will soon be available in French and Spanish.
11. To ensure that the system is operational and available to users, and for continued security, the Secretariat performs regular system updates and maintenance activities, as well as security audits, by both internal and external experts.
12. In terms of the planning of system enhancements and expansion, the Secretariat's planning has been driven by the interest expressed by the States Parties. Based on this, the two main directions of further enhancements were identified:
 - (a) the expansion of the scope of document types to be exchanged through SIX, which include documents under other Articles of the Convention (such as Articles VII and X), as well as specific types of documents, such as transfer discrepancy letters. An analysis on this has been conducted focusing on legal considerations, as well as any background work required to support this expansion. This analysis will guide the implementation of the new features; and

- (b) the exchange of classified information for to State Party-State Party communication, for example for the purpose of resolving transfer discrepancies. The Secretariat configured a second environment for SIX, which will be used for the testing and pilot deployment of a nodal communication mechanism. However, due to some delays with regard to the setup of the prototype, this work will continue into 2017.
13. At the end of 2015, the Secretariat completed an exercise with the users of the SIX system with a view to updating their cryptographic keys, which are approaching the expiration date. This process is dictated by internal operational procedures and serves to maintain the security of the system.

Conclusion

14. Since it was introduced in 2014, the SIX system has demonstrated the increased efficiency it will bring to the Secretariat and the States Parties. The Secretariat will continue its efforts to increase and expand the utilisation of the system, as well as to further improve the quality of this service provided to the States Parties.
15. Further questions or comments concerning SIX can be sent to the following:

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