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/1407/2016, dated 16 August 2016).

Overview of system utilisation

5. As at 28 July 2017, 44 States Parties had registered for the SIX system, resulting in authorisation for 73 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 37% from the Western Europe and Other States Group, 18% from Eastern Europe, 18% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 25% from Asia, and 2% from Africa.

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[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. These trends started in the first quarter of 2015 and continued in 2016 and 2017. As a result, the number of annual declarations on past activities received using the SIX system continues to increase. In the 2017 declaration round for past activities, 33 declarations were submitted using the SIX system, while in 2016 this number was 28 (an increase of 18%). Additionally, for the same declaration period a 24% decline in the use of other means of declaration transmission (hard copy, for example) has been observed, versus a 19% decline in the previous declaration period. Therefore, current trends indicate an overall increase and preference for the use of the electronic declaration transmission process, which allows States Parties to dedicate more time to the preparation of the declarations and benefit from a more effective and streamlined declaration submission process.

8.   Overall, the Secretariat has so far received 407 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, is now 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 State Party-State Party communication, for example for the purpose of resolving transfer discrepancies. The Secretariat has identified a process that will support the exchange of classified information between States Parties. A number of States Parties have voiced an interest in using the SIX system; the Secretariat plans to provide support to those States Parties and to others that express an interest, in time for the next round of transfer discrepancy resolution.

Conclusion

13. Since it was introduced in 2014, the SIX system has demonstrated the increased efficiency it brings 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.

14. Further questions or comments concerning SIX can be sent to the following:

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