ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Contribution to the Report of the Secretary-General to the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2002 UN Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education

Executive Summary

Over the reporting period, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) made significant contributions to disarmament and non-proliferation education. To strengthen implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), OPCW engaged with its Member States and other stakeholders through various educational initiatives around the world, including at the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

OPCW’s digital and in-person engagements were extensive. Its website and social media platforms saw substantial visitors. Educational videos related to chemical weapons were translated into six languages, enhancing global accessibility. E-learning offerings of the Secretariat were enhanced, including new online resources to increase capacity-building. OPCW also hosted outreach visits and events, connecting with diverse audiences.

Collaborations with academic institutions and other organisations led to delivery of educational programmes and workshops, raising awareness and building capacity, especially among youth and women.

OPCW facilitated engagement between OPCW Member States and the chemical industry, organising meetings and consultations with industry associations, as well as training to promote best industrial practices. OPCW also maintained a strong presence in the scientific community through attending conferences, issuing publications, and arranging workshops.

Full report

Introduction

1. Education and outreach (E&O) are increasingly important tools employed by the OPCW to engage with its Member States and various stakeholders at international, regional, and local levels regarding the core obligations of the CWC. Recognised by the Third CWC Review Conference (2013) as essential for supporting “the Convention’s role as a bulwark against chemical weapons,” E&O improves the OPCW’s interaction with stakeholders such as the chemical industry, the scientific community, academia, and civil society organisations, thereby strengthening national implementation of the Convention. Accordingly, the OPCW Member States and the OPCW Technical Secretariat share joint responsibilities in this area.
Outreach to the general public

2. The OPCW website (www.opcw.org) serves as the main public source of information on the Organisation and the CWC and makes available a range of education and outreach resources. The website was visited by approximately 400,000 users per year in 2022 and 2023.

3. In addition, the OPCW maintains several official social media accounts, including X (formerly known as ‘Twitter’), Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Mastodon. During the reporting period, there was a sustained growth in followers across all platforms, collectively reaching over two million impressions annually.

4. To increase the geographic reach of its content, in 2022 and 2023, the OPCW translated existing core educational videos (“OPCW Basics”) into all six official OPCW languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish). The videos are featured on the OPCW public website as well as the OPCW YouTube channel, and are used in digital outreach, as well as in OPCW capacity building activities. The following educational videos are available with voice-over and onscreen text in all six official OPCW languages:
   a) What is a chemical weapon?
   b) What is the Chemical Weapons Convention?
   c) What is a dual-use chemical?
   d) How to stay safe during a chemical emergency
   e) How are chemical weapons destroyed?
   f) OPCW: A look inside

5. OPCW offers both in-person and virtual group visits to its headquarters targeting a wide range of target audiences, from students to legal scholars and judges, to junior diplomats, security experts, and others. The free one-hour visits include a presentation by an OPCW expert, followed by a question-and-answer session, as well as a brief tour of the main headquarters building. The visits are designed to educate the participants as well as to make the CWC relevant to them no matter what their background. During the reporting period, the OPCW organised 74 educational outreach events in 2022 and 80 in 2023.

6. OPCW also continued its collaboration with the T.M.C. Asser Institute for their annual programme on ‘Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction’, which took place in September 2022 and 2023. During these programmes, early- to mid-career professionals increased their knowledge about the diplomatic, legal, and technical aspects of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and had an opportunity to engage with OPCW experts at the Organisation’s headquarters buildings, including at the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre), which was inaugurated in May 2023 in the presence of King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands.

7. To engage the citizens of the OPCW’s host country, the Netherlands, the Organisation participated in the annual International Open Day organised by the Municipality of The Hague. The Organisation opened its doors to hundreds of members of the public for
presentations and demonstrations of equipment designed to educate them about the CWC and the work of the OPCW.

8. With support from the European Union (EU), the OPCW and the EU office in The Hague organised a panel discussion/dialogue event on 30 November 2023 as a side event during the Twenty-Eighth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, focusing on engaging youth in chemical weapons disarmament. The aim of the event was to gather insights from young people, as well as experts working in youth engagement in disarmament contexts, on how to help the younger generation of advocates, practitioners and academics gain the necessary skills and take advantage of opportunities to support the implementation of CWC.

Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO)

9. During the reporting period, the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) focused on enhancing the Technical Secretariat’s e-learning offerings. The ABEO conducted a peer review of three introductory modules for universities on the OPCW and its mission, a project co-funded by the EU. Furthermore, the Board raised awareness about the OPCW’s mission among diverse audiences. It advised on the syllabus for a Diploma Course on the CWC and weapons of mass destruction, developed by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) for mid-career professionals that is scheduled to start in autumn 2024. The Board also continued its work to identify the most effective strategies for reaching wider audiences, with a special focus on women and youth, and collaborated with the Technical Secretariat to promote the CWC’s implementation and the peaceful uses of chemistry. In June 2023, the ABEO also resumed briefings to the OPCW Member States on its activities, a practice that had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outreach to chemical industry

10. The chemical industry is a key stakeholder in the CWC’s implementation. Throughout the reporting period, the Technical Secretariat facilitated dialogue between the National Authorities of OPCW Member States and the chemical industry by organising the Annual Meetings of National Authorities and Chemical Industry and holding regular consultations with the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA) and International Chemical Trade Association (ICTA). Industry representatives were also invited to contribute to selected OPCW international cooperation programmes, sharing expertise on the safe and secure management of chemicals, which enriched the OPCW capacity-building activities and supported the development of practical tools like voluntary guidelines for National Authorities.

11. Chemical industry associations make a major contribution to OPCW capacity-building activities through their involvement in the OPCW Associate Programme, the Organisation’s flagship professional development initiative since 2000. This programme promotes a culture of safety and best practice in chemical industries among OPCW Member States. In 2022, due to COVID-19-related restrictions, the industry component was scaled down to a field visit to a nearby chemical industry facility.

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1 The three e-Learning modules on the OPCW and its mission are available at www.learn.opcw.org.
arranged with the support of the ICCA. Participants were briefed on current industry trends and the role of their associations. In 2023, with reduced COVID-19 restrictions, 17 industrial plant facilities from 14 OPCW Member States hosted and trained 31 participants. Identifying facilities willing to take part in the industry component of the Programme was possible by support from OPCW Member States and ICCA.

Outreach to the scientific community and academia

12. Effective implementation of the CWC requires active engagement with scientific professionals, constant review of the evolving technological landscape, and an understanding of new scientific developments. The Technical Secretariat continued to foster collaboration and engagement across scientific communities. Conference attendance, the partnership with the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), and publications in scientific literature have enhanced the Technical Secretariat’s ability to stay abreast of developments in chemistry, maintain its visibility and credibility among scientific communities, promote responsibility and ethics in science, and support education and outreach activities.

13. The Technical Secretariat, along with members of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), maintained a visible presence amongst technical communities, delivering presentations at events and through publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals. In particular, they played a prominent role at the Forty-Ninth IUPAC World Chemistry Congress in August 2023, delivering presentations, participating in panels, and engaging with conference attendees to raise awareness of the OPCW. Engagement with science and technology was augmented with technical and educational materials made available through the OPCW public website and social media.

Outreach to OPCW Member States to support education and CWC implementation

14. Education and outreach are crucial to the ongoing implementation of the CWC and promotion of chemical disarmament and non-proliferation. During the reporting period, the Technical Secretariat engaged intensively in educational and outreach activities through various capacity building programmes. These efforts aimed to enhance the understanding among various stakeholder groups in OPCW Member States about the CWC and its effective implementation, thereby advancing chemical disarmament and non-proliferation.

15. Between June 2022 and May 2024, the Technical Secretariat organised a total of 159 educational and capacity building activities. These included workshops, seminars, forums, symposia, training courses and table-top and field exercises for diverse CWC stakeholders, such as government officials, customs officers, chemical emergency responders, chemical safety and security professionals, and laboratory chemists. Additionally, the Technical Secretariat continued to provide sponsorship for scientific conferences, fellowships, and research projects.

16. To deliver these educational programmes and activities, the OPCW partnered with regional and other international organisations, as well as national agencies, academic institutions, research organisations, and laboratories. Since becoming operational in
May 2023, the new ChemTech Centre has been increasingly utilised to improve the OPCW’s training and education offerings.

17. During the review period, several activities also focused on specific audiences, namely women, youth, and scientists. The Technical Secretariat also continued hosting a forum on the peaceful uses of chemistry and developing e-learning tools to increase its educational outreach.

18. The Technical Secretariat organised three symposia on women in chemistry, in cooperation with the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). These symposia took place in Turin, Italy in November 2022; at the ChemTech Centre, the Netherlands in June 2023; and in Panama City, Panama in May 2024. They highlighted the contribution of women to peaceful chemistry, promoted international solidarity and cooperation, and raised awareness of the opportunities for capacity and knowledge development in chemistry. At the 2022 symposium, a ‘Compendium of Best Practices on the Engagement and Advancement of Women in Chemical Safety and Security’ was launched, in line with the UN General Assembly resolution 75/48 on women, disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control. This EU-funded research, jointly conducted by the OPCW and UNICRI, identified best practices in recruiting, training, and promoting women in chemistry, serving as a guide for policymakers and chemistry practitioners on gender inclusivity.

19. The Technical Secretariat continued to educate female specialists in chemical emergency response. This included tailor-made training for female nurses and first responders. Training courses were conducted in Panama City in 2022 and in Spain in 2023 focusing on chemical accident emergency response for female Panamanian nurses and the organisation of health facilities during large-scale chemical incidents. An online ‘Foundation Course’ as part of the 2024-2025 Swiss Training Cycle for Women First Responders was also delivered from the ChemTech Centre in March-April 2024.

20. Throughout the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to promote knowledge of the CWC and peaceful and secure uses of chemistry among global youth. With support from the EU, it launched the ‘Education and Training Programme on Peaceful Uses of Chemistry for Youth’. The first edition was held online in April 2022, and the second edition took place in person in collaboration with the Government of Morocco and the National School of Chemistry, in Kenitra, Morocco in October-November 2022. Another edition of this programme was organised in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil and online in April 2024, in collaboration with the Government of Brazil and with EU funding. These activities raised youth awareness on about the CWC, education and ethical issues for chemists, multiple uses of chemicals, and the importance of chemical safety and security management for the peaceful uses of chemicals.

21. To advance the peaceful and secure uses of chemistry, the Secretariat, in cooperation with the Malaysian National Authority, organised the ‘Forum on Peaceful Uses of Chemistry’ in May 2023, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The forum aimed to raise awareness and deepen participants’ understanding of chemical safety and security management as well as promoting green and sustainable chemistry.
22. The Technical Secretariat also relaunched the ‘Policy and Diplomacy for Scientists’ workshop in June 2023, at the ChemTech Centre. This event highlighted the role of science and scientists in disarmament, promoting responsible research practices in chemical and biochemical sciences. It addressed the dual uses of scientific research, the impact of scientific and technological developments on international security, and the role of science and academia in minimising chemical risks.

23. Additionally, the second phase of the ‘Chemical Safety and Security Tools Development Programme’ continued during the reporting period. Two workshops were organised (one in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in February 2023 and another held online in November 2023) to develop indicative guidelines for the transportation of hazardous chemicals by road.

24. The Technical Secretariat continued enhancing its remote education resources by adding new e-learning modules to its virtual learning platform. In January 2023, a new set of modules covering a broad range of CWC-related issues was launched. These modules facilitate cost-effective dissemination of critical CWC knowledge to a wide audience, complementing existing educational and capacity-development activities that support OPCW Member States in effectively implementing the Convention.

25. OPCW’s ‘Science for Diplomats’ events resumed in November 2022 following a two-year pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These events provided an informal and interactive forum for OPCW (and affiliated) scientists to engage with representatives from OPCW Member States on a range of scientific themes. They aimed to enhance participants’ understanding of key scientific and technological issues relevant to the CWC through presentations, hands-on activities, demonstrations, and question-and-answer sessions. This encourages open and productive dialogue between scientists and diplomats. During the reporting period, four events took place, focusing on newly scheduled chemicals, emerging technologies, biotoxins, and chemical forensics.

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