

IV. Chemical arms control and disarmament

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The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) contains a comprehensive and unequivocal prohibition of chemical weapons and warfare. As of December 2021, it had 193 states parties. Of the four states not party to the CWC, Israel has signed but not ratified it, and Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan have neither signed nor ratified or acceded to the CWC.¹

This section provides an update on the case of the Russian citizen Alexei Navalny's poisoning in August 2020 with a novichok nerve agent, as well as other developments in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) during 2021.² As of December 2021, the Navalny case had not yet been officially investigated or resolved, and it continued to cause political tensions between Russia and a number of Western countries, in particular France, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Use of novichok agents

Sanctions related to the use of novichoks

The political repercussions of the novichok attack against Navalny carried over into 2021. The sanctions enacted by the European Union (EU) in October 2020 remained in place and were extended for one year on 11 October 2021.³ They target six Russian government officials whom the EU holds responsible for 'inducing', 'providing support to' or 'assisting' the perpetrators of the attack against Navalny, as well as a research institute in Moscow for failing to 'destroy the stockpiles of chemical weapons'.⁴ The UK maintains sanctions against the same targets as part of its own chemical weapons sanctions regime.⁵ The USA, in coordination with the EU and the UK, also enacted two sets of sanctions in March and in August 2021.⁶ In August, the USA and the UK also added seven individuals to their sanctions lists; all seven are

¹ For a summary and other details of the Chemical Weapons Convention see annex A, section I, in this volume.

² For background see McLeish, C., 'Use of novichok agents', *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 489–93.

³ McLeish (note 2), p. 492; and Council of the EU, 'EU sanctions against chemical weapons renewed for one year', Press release, 11 Oct. 2021.

⁴ Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1480 of 14 October 2020 implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1542 concerning restrictive measures against the proliferation and use of chemical weapons, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L341, 15 Oct. 2020; and Council of the EU (note 3).

⁵ The Chemical Weapons (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (UK).

⁶ US Department of State, 'US sanctions and other measures imposed on Russia in response to Russia's use of chemical weapons', Fact sheet, 2 Mar. 2021; US Department of State, 'United States imposes additional costs on Russia for the poisoning of Aleksey Navalny', Fact sheet, 20 Aug. 2021; and Congressional Research Service (CRS), 'Russia: the Navalny poisoning, chemical weapons use, and US sanctions', CRS *In Focus* report no. IF11872, Updated 26 Aug. 2021.

members of the Russian intelligence service FSB and allegedly took part in the attack on Navalny.⁷

Debates within the OPCW policy-making organs

In the debates during the 2021 meetings of the OPCW Executive Council and the conference of states parties (CSP), many delegations submitted statements condemning the use of a novichok agent.⁸ The statements affirmed that such an attack against an individual constituted chemical weapons use and as such was completely unacceptable and a violation of the CWC and international norms; declared that those responsible for chemical weapons use must be held accountable, and there must be no impunity; called on Russia to fully investigate the incident and disclose all related information; and expressed their regret or concern that no technical assistance visit (TAV) to Russia had taken place. While the delegations of the EU, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the USA were the most outspoken on this issue, a group of 46 and later 55 states parties presented joint statements expressing their support for the positions outlined above.⁹ Moreover, the UK and, more explicitly, the USA accused Russia of violating the CWC, with both countries calling on Russia to declare and destroy any remaining chemical weapons, including novichok agents.¹⁰

Russia continued to deny any responsibility for the case.¹¹ It did not accept the findings that a novichok agent was used on Russian territory in the first place, instead viewing this narrative as fabricated and politically motivated. The Russian delegation also suggested that the OPCW Technical Secretariat had not been acting in an impartial manner, and that several Western countries had refused to cooperate with Russia, in particular following Russia's requests to Germany, France and Sweden for legal assistance and coopera-

⁷ British government, 'The UK sanctions list', Brexit Guidance, 6 July 2020 (updated 22 Dec. 2021); British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'UK sanctions Russian FSB operatives over poisoning of Alexey Navalny', Press release, 20 Aug. 2021; and US Department of State, 'United States imposes additional costs on Russia for the poisoning of Aleksey Navalny' (note 6).

⁸ See e.g. the statements of the EU, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the USA, as well as joint statements, at the 97th Session of the Executive Council (EC97) and the 26th Conference of the States Parties (CSP26).

⁹ See the joint statements delivered at the 96th Session of the Executive Council (EC96) by Lithuania on behalf of 45 states EC-96/NAT.21, 9 Mar. 2021; and at CSP26 by Bulgaria on behalf of 55 states, 29 Nov. 2021.

¹⁰ UK delegation to the OPCW, Statement on the use of a novichok nerve agent delivered at EC97, 19 July 2021; Roper, J., Statement by the permanent representative of the UK to the 98th session of the Executive Council (EC98), 4 Oct. 2021; US delegation statements at the 25th Conference of the States Parties (CSP25), C-25/NAT.98, 20 Apr. 2021; at EC96, EC-96/NAT.24, 9 Mar. 2021; and at EC97, EC-97/NAT.16, 6 July 2021.

¹¹ Russian delegation to the OPCW, Statement delivered at CSP25, C-25/NAT.48, 19 Feb. 2021; see also statement by Russia at CSP26 under agenda item 9—status of implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in OPCW, 'CSP-26—29 November 2021—afternoon', Webcast, 29 Nov. 2021.

tion under the CWC and the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.¹²

Invoking the consultation and clarification procedure under CWC Article IX

On 5 October 2021 the UK on behalf of 45 states parties invoked the consultation and clarification procedure contained in Article IX, paragraph 2 of the CWC.¹³ This paragraph 2 provides:

States Parties should, whenever possible, first make every effort to clarify and resolve, through exchange of information and consultations among themselves, any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with this Convention, or which gives rise to concerns about a related matter which may be considered ambiguous. A State Party which receives a request from another State Party for clarification . . . shall provide the requesting State Party as soon as possible, but in any case not later than 10 days after the request, with information sufficient to answer the doubt or concern raised along with an explanation of how the information provided resolves the matter.

The group asked for information regarding Russia's actions and any planned further steps to explain, address and clarify the Navalny incident. They moreover requested Russia to share the results of its investigation with OPCW members and to inform member states about the status of its cooperation with the OPCW, in particular with regard to the TAV.¹⁴ In its response, Russia did not address these questions directly but rather, as mentioned above, requested information and clarification from Germany, the UK, France, Sweden and the OPCW Technical Secretariat, which it considered essential for the decision to open its own criminal investigation.¹⁵ Both sides have so far considered the other side's responses insufficient,¹⁶ and Russia and the UK have already submitted further requests for information as official documents for the 99th session of the Executive Council, scheduled for March 2022.¹⁷ The clarification process will likely continue in 2022.

¹² European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, signed 20 June 1959, entered into force 12 June 1962.

¹³ The request for clarification by the UK permanent representative to the OPCW, on behalf of 45 member states, was first submitted to Russia via the Technical Secretariat in Note Verbale no. 093/2021 on 5 Oct. 2021 and repeated in Note Verbale no. 109/2021, EC-99/NAT.1, 5 Nov. 2021.

¹⁴ UK permanent representative to the OPCW, EC-99/NAT.1 (note 13).

¹⁵ These requests referred to the role of certain individuals that were present on Navalny's flight to Berlin, to a possible piece of evidence currently in German custody, to the formula of the chemical agent identified in Navalny's biomedical samples, and to video footage from the TAV to Germany. See Russian permanent representative to the OPCW, Note Verbale no. 54, EC-98/NAT.13, 2 Nov. 2021; Note Verbale no. 44, EC-98/NAT.8, 7 Oct. 2021; and Note Verbale no. 58, EC-99/NAT.2, 15 Nov. 2021. Copies of the requests for legal assistance submitted by Russia to Germany, France and Sweden, as well as other related documents, are contained in the annexes to EC-98/NAT.8.

¹⁶ See the notes verbales submitted at EC98, by France, no. 2021-0496245, EC-98/NAT.10, 18 Oct. 2021; Germany, no. 41/2021, EC-98/NAT.9, 18 Oct. 2021; Russia, no. 54, EC-98/NAT.13, 2 Nov. 2021; Sweden, EC-98/NAT.12, 18 Oct. 2021; and the UK, no. 101/2021, EC-98/NAT.11, 18 Oct. 2021.

¹⁷ UK permanent representative to the OPCW, EC-99/NAT.1 (note 13); and Russian permanent representative to the OPCW, Note Verbale no. 58, EC-99/NAT.2 (note 15).

Other developments in the OPCW

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on OPCW activities and meetings

The meeting of the 25th conference of the states parties (CSP25) was originally scheduled for 2020 but was split into two sessions due to the pandemic situation.¹⁸ The second session of CSP25 in April 2021 and the 26th conference of the states parties (CSP26) in November 2021, as well as the meetings of the Executive Council, were held as in-person meetings, albeit similar to 2020 with limited attendance and a webcast due to the pandemic restrictions.¹⁹ Subsidiary bodies such as the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) held their meetings virtually.²⁰ Germany, supported by 12 co-sponsors, tabled a draft decision at the 98th session of the Executive Council (EC98) in October 2021 that would enable the council to meet in a virtual format in emergency situations.²¹ However, council members deferred the decision on this proposal to the next session, scheduled for March 2022.²²

The Covid-19 pandemic again affected the activities of the Technical Secretariat in 2021.²³ Due to travel and other restrictions, the Secretariat could not carry out all its planned and mandated inspection and verification activities, but had to prioritize its missions.²⁴ Other routine activities were carried out as far as possible under pandemic conditions.²⁵ Regarding international assistance activities, meetings were held virtually where possible, but the number of journeys and activities had to be reduced; the Fellowship Programme was temporarily suspended but was able to resume towards the end of 2021.²⁶

¹⁸ OPCW, 25th Conference of the States Parties (CSP25), 'Report of the Twenty-fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties', C-25/5, 22 Apr. 2021.

¹⁹ See e.g. OPCW, Technical Secretariat, 'Update on the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the OPCW programme in 2021', Note by the Technical Secretariat, S/1996/2021, 5 Oct. 2021; and McLeish, C., 'Chemical weapons: Arms control and disarmament', *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, p. 495.

²⁰ OPCW, Executive Council, 'Report on the activities of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach covering the period 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021', Note by the Director-General, EC-98/DG.17, 16 Sep. 2021; OPCW, Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), 'Report of the Scientific Advisory Board at its Thirty-first Session', SAB-31/1, 4 Mar. 2021; OPCW, SAB, 'Report of the Scientific Advisory Board at its Thirty-Second Session', SAB-32/1, 17 June 2021; and OPCW, SAB, 'Report of the Scientific Advisory Board at its Thirty-Third Session', SAB-33/1, 18 Nov. 2021.

²¹ German permanent representative to the OPCW, Note Verbale no. 33/2021, 28 Sep. 2021, pp. 2–4 (Draft Decision: 'Allowing the Convening of Executive Council Meetings or Sessions in Extraordinary Circumstances').

²² OPCW, Executive Council, Report of the 98th Session of the Executive Council, EC-98/5, 7 Oct. 2021, p. 14, para. 17.6.

²³ OPCW, S/1996/2021 (note 19). See also McLeish, C., 'Allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria', *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 494–95.

²⁴ See OPCW, Technical Secretariat, 'Update on the impact of the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) on the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons programme in 2021', Note by the Technical Secretariat, S/1930/2021, 18 Feb. 2021; and OPCW, S/1996/2021 (note 19).

²⁵ OPCW, S/1996/2021 (note 19), pp. 3–4.

²⁶ OPCW, S/1996/2021 (note 19), p. 4.

Re-appointment of the OPCW director-general

CSP26 re-appointed Fernando Arias as director-general for a second four-year term of office commencing in July 2022.²⁷ The EU and 22 states parties took the floor to express their strong support for Director-General Arias and for the renewal of his appointment. Russia criticized some changes it perceived in the OPCW's approach since Arias took office, including what it saw as a politicization of the OPCW and a turn away from the strictly impartial and technical work of the Technical Secretariat. The Russian representative also took issue with the fact that no alternative candidate was put forward for the appointment. In its explanation of vote, Russia stated that it disassociated itself from the consensus decision to renew the director-general's appointment.²⁸

The OPCW budget for 2022–23

In 2021, states parties for the first time decided on a biannual budget for the OPCW, moving away from the previous yearly cycle. Neither at EC98 nor at CSP26 was there consensus on the draft programme and budget. In the Executive Council, a majority of 31 states parties supported the draft. Three states parties—China, Iran and Russia—voted against its adoption, and seven countries abstained.²⁹ At CSP26, of the 132 states present and voting, 102 voted in favour of the draft, 12 states opposed it and 18 abstained.³⁰ Several states offered explanations of their vote.³¹ To highlight but a few examples, both Russia and Iran explained they did not wish to support a budget that includes funding for the IIT, reiterating their well-known position that the IIT is illegal and not covered by the CWC. Supporters of the draft budget pointed out that the OPCW needs a solid and predictable financial basis to carry out its work. Explanations offered for abstentions included concerns about the departure from consensus decisions on the budget; the move away from a zero nominal growth policy, which some states could not support for domestic political or economic reasons; concerns that the planned budget included funding for non-consensual items (such as the IIT); and dissatis-

²⁷ OPCW, CSP26, 'Renewal of the appointment of the Director-General', Decision, C-26/DEC.9, 30 Nov. 2021.

²⁸ OPCW, CSP26, 'Report of the Twenty-sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties', 2 Dec. 2021, C-26/5, p. 16; and OPCW, 'CSP26—30 November 2021—Afternoon', Webcast, 30 Nov. 2021, Agenda item 22 (Appointment of the Director-General), 00:26:56 (intervention of Russia).

²⁹ OPCW, Executive Council, 'Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2022–2023', Decision, EC-98/DEC.5, 6 Oct. 2021; and OPCW, Executive Council, 'Report of the Ninety-eighth Session of the Executive Council', EC-98/5, 7 Oct. 2021, para. 10.19.

³⁰ OPCW, CSP26, 'Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2022–2023', Decision, C-26/DEC.11, 1 Dec. 2021; and OPCW, C-26/5 (note 28), para. 13.4.

³¹ OPCW, 'CSP-26—1 December 2021—morning', Webcast, 1 Dec. 2021, Agenda item 13 (Biennial Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2022 and 2023), 1:29:39.

faction with transfers of funds away from the International Cooperation and Assistance Programme.³²

Use of central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes

The use of chemicals acting on the central nervous system (CNS) for law enforcement purposes continued to be an issue in 2021. At the recommendation of the 96th Session of the Executive Council (EC96), CSP26 adopted the decision ‘that the aerosolised use of CNS-acting chemicals is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited” under the Convention’.³³ The topic was first officially discussed at the second CWC review conference in 2008 at the initiative of Switzerland. That country, later supported by Australia and subsequently the USA, continued to advocate a clarification by states parties that such use was prohibited by the CWC. This initiative built on and was supported by even earlier efforts undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society groups, as well as the work of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) on this issue.³⁴ In a 2018 report, the SAB stated that CNS-acting chemicals differ from riot control agents, which are permitted under the CWC for law enforcement purposes, due to their different properties and effects, and that ‘chemicals that selectively modify CNS functions . . . can have a very low safety margin when delivered as an aerosol’.³⁵

Like the draft programme and budget, this draft decision did not command consensus at either forum. Of the 128 states parties voting on this draft decision at CSP26, 85 supported it, 10 opposed it and 33 abstained.³⁶ In explaining their vote, several countries referred to the SAB’s assessment as one reason for their positive vote. Some emphasized that the decision did not entail any additional financial or other obligations and that it was based on the scientific state of the art as elaborated by the SAB. Some proponents also suggested that further dialogue was necessary and desirable within the OPCW to achieve wider support for this decision. This view was also shared

³² OPCW, Webcast (note 31). Some explanations of votes are also available as official documents at <<https://www.opcw.org/resources/documents/csp26>>. On the transfer of funds see e.g. OPCW, Executive Council, ‘Transfers of funds during 2020’, Note by the Director-General, EC-97/DG.12 and C-26/DG.3, 22 June 2021.

³³ OPCW, CSP26, ‘Understanding regarding the aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes’, Decision, C-26/DEC.10, 1 Dec. 2021.

³⁴ Switzerland, Statement by HE Heinz Walker-Nederkoorn, Permanent representative of Switzerland to the OPCW, to the 26th CSP, The Hague, 1 Dec. 2021; and International Committee of the Red Cross, Statement at the 26th CSP to the CWC, 26 Nov. 2021.

³⁵ OPCW, Fourth Session of the Review Conference, ‘Report of the Scientific Advisory Board on developments in science and technology for the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to review the operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention’, RC-4/DG.1, 30 Apr. 2018, para. 97.

³⁶ OPCW, C-26/5 (note 28), para. 26.7. For the vote in the Executive Council see OPCW, Executive Council, ‘Report of the Ninety-sixth Session of the Executive Council’, EC-96/2, 12 Mar. 2021, para. 14.14.

by some states that had abstained; some explained they were dissatisfied with the process rather than the substance of the decision, and some cited principled opposition to the tendency to move away from consensus-based decisions towards more frequent voting in the OPCW. States opposed mostly criticized the decision for having no basis in the CWC, but rather constituting a de facto amendment of the convention and illegally circumventing the pertinent procedure under CWC Article VX. Iran and Russia explicitly disassociated themselves from the decision.³⁷ The ICRC welcomed the recommendation of EC96 and the draft decision but added, 'At the ICRC, we are of the view that the decision should not be interpreted as meaning that non-CNS-acting, non-aerosol-delivered toxic chemicals are therefore acceptable as weapons in law enforcement'.³⁸

OPCW activities concerning international cooperation and assistance

In 2021 the OPCW Technical Secretariat carried out a range of measures, under Article XI of the CWC, to address international cooperation and exchange of chemicals, equipment and know-how for purposes not prohibited under the CWC. These activities included, for example, capacity building in the area of chemical safety and security, and the enhancement of laboratory capabilities.³⁹ However, several states parties expressed their concern that funds had been transferred out of the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) programme several times; for instance, the group of African states parties to the OPCW (African Group) called 'upon the Secretariat and states Parties to work collectively to address this concern and to come up with sustainable solutions that would enable the retention of unspent funds for future ICA activities'.⁴⁰ The Technical Secretariat also continued to implement the Africa Programme, which includes activities in the areas of capacity building, technical assistance, training, and exchanges among scientists including through fellowships. The ongoing pandemic restrictions meant that most of the activities had to be conducted online.⁴¹ In October 2021 Algeria issued a statement on behalf of the African Group that, while welcoming the activities under the Africa Programme, suggested the programme should be covered by the regular OPCW budget instead of being funded through voluntary contributions.⁴²

³⁷ See OPCW (note 31), agenda item 26 (Any other business), 00:02:11.

³⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross, Statement to CSP26, 29 Nov. 2021, p. 2.

³⁹ OPCW, Executive Council, 'Progress made and review of the status of the implementation of Article XI of the Chemical Weapons Convention', Report by the Director-General, EC-98/DG.9, C-26/DG.7, 2 Sep. 2021.

⁴⁰ Algerian permanent representative to the OPCW, Statement on behalf of the African Group, EC-98/NAT.20, 5 Oct. 2021, p. 4.

⁴¹ OPCW, Executive Council, 'The Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention', Note by the Director-General, EC-98/DG.14, C-26/DG.12, 9 Sep. 2021.

⁴² Algerian permanent representative to the OPCW (note 40), p. 4.

Destruction of chemical weapons in the United States

The USA, the only chemical weapons possessor state that has not yet completed the destruction of its declared chemical weapons, continued the elimination of its stockpile under OPCW verification. As of October 2021, it had destroyed over 97 per cent of its declared stockpiles and was planning to complete the destruction process according to schedule by 30 September 2023.⁴³

The new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology

The project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) entered a new phase in 2021. Construction activities on the building started in June, and the contracts for security-related installations and laboratory furnishings were awarded in July and October, respectively.⁴⁴ The construction process is currently scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022. Voluntary contributions pledged to the project, from 51 countries, the EU and other donors, total around 33.7 million euros, covering the ChemTech Centre's estimated costs of around 33.4 million euros.⁴⁵

Scientific Advisory Board of the OPCW

According to its reports, the SAB focused on three areas of work: the preparations of its report for the fifth CWC review conference, scheduled for 2023; ideas and plans for workshops within the chemicals industry; and the new temporary working group (TWG) on the analysis of biotoxins, which took up its work in 2021.⁴⁶ In his response to the SAB report on its 33rd session, Director-General Arias expressed his support for their recommendations, namely a joint workshop with the International Union of Pure and Applied Sciences (IUPAC) in preparation for the fifth review conference, a workshop on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in chemistry, and enhancing outreach and capacity building with regard to dissemination technologies.⁴⁷

⁴³ US permanent representative to the OPCW, Statement at the 98th Session of the Executive Council, EC-98/NAT.15, 5 Oct. 2021, p. 2; and OPCW, Executive Council, 'Overall progress with respect to the destruction of the remaining chemical weapons stockpiles', Report by the Director-General, EC-97/DG.18, 30 June 2021.

⁴⁴ OPCW, Technical Secretariat, 'Progress in the project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology', Note by the Technical Secretariat, S/1956/2021, 17 May 2021, p. 3, and S/2003/2021, 9 Nov. 2021, p. 4.

⁴⁵ OPCW, S/2003/2021 (note 44), pp. 4–5.

⁴⁶ OPCW, SAB-31/1, SAB-32/1 and SAB-33-1 (note 20); OPCW, SAB, 'Summary of the first meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board's temporary working group on the analysis of biotoxins', SAB-32/WP.1, 6 May 2021; and OPCW, SAB, 'Summary of the second meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board's temporary working group on the analysis of biotoxins', SAB-33/WP.1, 15 Oct. 2021.

⁴⁷ OPCW, Executive Council, 'Response to the Report of the Thirty-second Session of the Scientific Advisory Board, 15–17 June 2021', Note by the Director-General, EC-98/DG.21, 22 Sep. 2021.

These recommendations tie in with the broader efforts of the SAB to identify, in cooperation with industry representatives, scientific and technological developments that are potentially relevant to the CWC or that may pose challenges for industry verification. They also reflect the SAB's own work in 2021 regarding the use of AI and computing power in the chemical industry, for example in advanced synthesis planning and dissemination technologies, among other things.⁴⁸

The TWG on the analysis of biotoxins, chaired by SAB member Dr Daan Nort, comprised eight SAB members and six external experts. The TWG's focus was on the 'identification of materials of biological origin relevant to the Convention, analysis techniques and procedures, and current and future collaboration with other organisations'.⁴⁹

OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach

At its 10th session in February 2021, the ABEO agreed its strategic plan, which included focusing on enhancing e-learning opportunities, fostering the impact of capacity building, and continuing to work on awareness-raising about chemical safety and security.⁵⁰ The TWG on e-learning, established in September 2020, continued its work in 2021 by reviewing the Secretariat's existing e-learning offers, which aim to provide training and information to national authorities and other stakeholders about the central provisions of and obligations under the CWC.⁵¹ The TWG also formulated recommendations for a future e-learning strategy, among other things, and presented its report to EC98.⁵²

Outlook

At the time of writing, it was difficult to predict to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to affect the work and meetings of the OPCW in 2022. At the very least, there will probably be repercussions concerning the Technical Secretariat's inspection and verification activities. The problem of chemical weapons use will continue to play an important role in the OPCW's work, and it is unlikely that the existing political differences will be overcome in the short term. The Executive Council is expected to establish an open-ended working group which, together with the Technical Secretariat, is to start preparations for the fifth review conference, scheduled for May 2023.⁵³

⁴⁸ OPCW, SAB-32/1 (note 20).

⁴⁹ OPCW, SAB-31/1 (note 20), p. 9.

⁵⁰ OPCW, Executive Council, EC-98/DG.17 (note 20), p. 2.

⁵¹ OPCW, Technical Secretariat, 'OPCW E-learning', [n.d.].

⁵² OPCW, EC-98/DG.17 (note 20), p. 6 (see the annex for the TWG report on e-learning); and Weinig, J.-G., Chair of the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, Statement to CSP26, 29 Nov. to 3 Dec. 2021.

⁵³ OPCW, C-26/5 (note 28), para. 25.1.