Fighting the COVID-19 Outbreak in Cameroon

The new coronavirus, COVID-19, was first encountered in November 2019. It has gone on to affect over 1,000,000 people in over 209 countries, areas or territories around the world, causing more than 62,000 deaths as of 6 April 2020, reported WHO. On the same date, Cameroon’s active cases had shot up to 650, causing nine deaths within two weeks following detection of the first case, according to covidvisualizer.com. The pandemic is growing exponentially and more lives are lost daily. Understanding the nature of this deadly and fast-spreading disease, and working in unity to fight it, are essential if we are to cap the number of infected persons and flatten the spread curve.

OPCW’s Centre for Chemistry and Technology: A priority to remain fit for purpose

What Happened: In his opening statement to the 24th Conference of the States Parties at the World Forum at The Hague in the Netherlands, from 25-29 November 2019, the OPCW Director-General H.E. Mr. Fernando Arias reported that progress has been made in the project to build a new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre), read full statement.

Why It Matters: The project to build the new OPCW Centre for
Chemistry and Technology – the ChemTech Centre, in Pijnacker-Nootdorp, matters for three reasons. First, the requirements of the States Parties have evolved and grown significantly in recent times. This has led to increasingly severe space constraints in the existing Laboratory and Equipment Store at Rijswijk. The Store is a rented facility, which cannot be expanded. Also, it has an aging infrastructure, which has not been upgraded in a significant way since 1996.

Second, the OPCW and its Member States have an urgent need to respond to the emergence of new chemical weapons threats. The need includes the development of new and improved verification tools and expanded capabilities to conduct non-routine missions. Also, the need requires the OPCW to provide more significant support for international cooperation and assistance activities. To this end, the ChemTech Centre aims to provide a platform for the OPCW Member States to conduct research activities with the mission of supporting and strengthening the verification toolkit, whether that be on its own, or in cooperation with the Organization’s partner laboratories or partners in academia.

Third, the OPCW ChemTech facility is a concrete step to keep up-to-date with current threats, to remain ahead of future threats, to act as a knowledge repository to tackle chemical threats worldwide and augment its current capability to test, to evaluate and deploy equipment, and to provide in-house capacity-building programs for the OPCW Member States.

**Background:** The scope of the new project to build the ChemTech Centre consists of two significant tasks. The primary task is the construction of the new ChemTech Centre. It will provide enhanced and enlarged facilities for the Laboratory, Equipment Store, and training, as well as the land and infrastructure required to accommodate and operate the building. The secondary task is the decommissioning of the current facility in Rijswijk, a town and municipality in the Western
Netherlands, in the province of South Holland, and the transition from Rijswijk facility to the ChemTech Centre.

The OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store was inaugurated in 1996 in the town of Rijswijk, which is just outside The Hague. Initially, the work of the Laboratory and Equipment Store focused primarily on supporting the OPCW’s demilitarisation activities and missions, routine inspections of industrial facilities for verification purposes, and international cooperation and assistance activities. However, the threats have been evolving significantly and the Member States needs have been changing severely.

The turning point was in 2017 when the Technical Secretariat began to study options for upgrading the organization’s capabilities. The Technical Secretariat prepared a report in the fourth quarter of that year. The report describes the need, initial estimated cost, and an initial estimated timeline for a project to construct a new facility for the Laboratory and Equipment Store, read full report. During the 22nd Session of the Conference of the States Parties in November of 2017, the Needs Statement was presented to State Parties. Thus, the project to construct the new ChemTech Centre was borne.

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