

92nd session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Thank you Chair. I'll try to set a good example. The UK associates itself with the statement made by the Finnish Ambassador on behalf of the EU.

I do want to give a big welcome to the many new colleagues, it's going to be a busy autumn ahead of us.

The most immediate task is to reflect on the recent weeks of discussions on the Director-General's draft programme and budget for 2020 and then provide a recommendation to the November Conference of States Parties. We studied it carefully and we welcome the efforts made by the Technical Secretariat to ensure that there will be no increase to the 2019 level of assessed contributions. We recognise that this is challenging given States Parties clear preference for core programmes and activities to be funded from the regular budget whenever possible. But the OPCW must continue to evolve and reform in response to new challenges, some of those will have budget implications.

We can also support the proposals for the use of the 2017 cash surplus. Many organisations struggle to deliver large IT projects. But it is clear that there needs to be a real focus now on ensuring the successful delivery of the Enterprise Resource Planning project as soon as possible.

We were particularly pleased to see a proposal to use some of the cash surplus to strengthen capacity in national Laboratories. This was also a focus for part of the UK's additional voluntary contributions this year and should help meet the objective of broadening the network of Designated Labs around the world.

We were, however, concerned to read the Director General's recent note on the overall cash situation. It highlighted the troubling lag in the receipt of assessed contributions and the pressure this puts on the OPCW's finances. We strongly urge all States Parties to settle their outstanding assessed contributions and other financial obligations in full, and urgently.

Mr Chair, the situation in Syria has been a long term and worrying pre-occupation of this Council. As we heard in the briefing by Technical Secretariat experts last week, Syria has made no progress since we last met in resolving the multitude of outstanding problems with their Declaration. These issues are significant, and they highlight Syria's failure to fully disclose and destroy its chemical weapons programme. Syria has had every opportunity to demonstrate that it is serious about meeting its commitments under the Convention. And yet still, six years on, they have still failed to do so.

Instead we are confronted with a pattern of repeated chemical weapons use against the Syrian people. The UK has grave concerns about the most recent

chemical attack on 19 May 2019 in Al-Kabaneh. We have shared information about this incident with the OPCW. And we will continue to shine a light on these abuses. Syria's persistent non-cooperation must not continue.

We were pleased to hear about the progress being made by the Investigation and Identification Team to identify those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We look forward to their first report issuing in due course.

Mr Chair,

As we start to look ahead to the autumn Conference of States Parties an important issue before us will be the Canadian, Dutch and US proposal to add two families of Novichok to Schedule 1. This Council supported that proposal in January and we encourage all States Parties to join consensus on the adoption of the draft Decision in November in order to ensure greater oversight of these very dangerous chemical weapons.

We are also aware of the Russian Federation's recent proposal which removes those chemical structures not found to meet the criteria for inclusion in Schedule One. If the Russian Federation brings forward a Decision along the same lines then we would not oppose its adoption, as we indicated back in February.

In advance of the CSP we were deeply concerned to hear that a handful of states are trying to block the attendance of some well-respected civil society organisations as others have mentioned. This runs counter to guidelines previously agreed by us all and is completely unjustified, particularly for NGOs which have attended past CSPs. Bolstering awareness of the OPCW and its important work is something we should all support.

Thank you Mr Chair, and I hope I've set a good example.

[The Year of Education 2020: UK and Lebanon together for education](#)

Today, British Ambassador to Lebanon Chris Rampling launched UK-Lebanon Year of Education 2020 campaign during the British Council's partnership agreement with the American University of Beirut (AUB) for Computer Delivered International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in the presence of HE Minister of Education and Higher Education Akram Chehayeb, MP Bahia Hariri, Director of the British Council David Knox, AUB Provost Dr. Mohamed Harajli and Dr Karma El Hassan, Director, Office of Institutional Research & Assessment at AUB, representative of the Lebanese Army Commander, General Camile Faisal, and representative of the HEAD of the Internal Security Forces Colonel Elie El Asmar.

The joint agreement will see the establishment of the first ever in Lebanon computer online delivered IELTS which will make it significantly easier for students to gain necessary English language qualifications, and compete in the global market. More than 10,000 organisations globally trust IELTS, which gives confidence to those taking the test that it is recognised by educational institutions, employers, governments and professional bodies around the world.

The Year of Education 2020 campaign builds on the UK's substantive education support to Lebanon, providing over \$200 million between 2016 and 2021, placing it amongst the top education donors in Lebanon. The Year of Education 2020 campaign will see continued work with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to expand education access, quality and systems. It will support more inclusive education for children with special educational needs, promote Lebanon as an important investment opportunity for UK EdTech firms, and strengthen and expand British-Lebanese university links. The campaign will also better celebrate UK educated Lebanese alumni and increase English language training – including in places outside of the capital– and champion the use of UK qualifications.

Following the event, British Ambassador Chris Rampling said:

It is a great privilege for us to be here. Thank you to the American University of Beirut for hosting us and for their collaboration with the British Council on the launch of the Computer Delivered IELTS in Beirut. The partnership is not the first with this highly distinguished institution. But it is a great point of pride to me personally that the British Council, with its excellent history in this country, is partnering with one of Lebanon's top academic institutions.

And there is no better way to launch the UK-Lebanon Year of Education 2020 than with you all: Lebanese – and partners of this amazing country – who are determined to build a bright future for Lebanon and for those who live in Lebanon. Because the UK is proud to partner a country that not only values, promotes and prioritises education, but also a country that has bravely and commendably committed to providing education to all children within the country.

Four of the top 10 universities in the world are British. Over a third of Nobel Prize winners who have studied overseas have done so in the UK. The English language is truly the world's language, and UK qualifications are recognised for their quality and credibility across the globe. As a sign of our education leadership, in the last five years there has been a 90% increase in the number of Lebanese students studying in the UK. Education is not just about schools and universities.

And our support goes beyond further. Over 200 Lebanese students have studied in the UK through the prestigious Chevening programme

and are now part of a wider network of over 50,000 Cheveners around the world. When it comes to training support, over 200 Lebanese Army officers have trained at the UK's elite military training institutions – some of the very best military establishments in the World. The UK is also proud to have trained 11,000 Lebanese Army soldiers here in Lebanon, along with training programmes for the Internal Security Forces. And we continue to work closely with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to support quality formal, non-formal and inclusive education to all children across Lebanon.

Minister of Education and Higher Education Akram Chehayeb:

The year of Education for us is the year of challenges on all levels. The challenge of ourselves to continue providing good learning despite the difficulties. The challenge to develop education and move to the digital era amidst all the pressures and economic difficulties. The challenge of openness on the educational systems adopted in the advanced countries despite the wars and regional tension and blocked horizon.

Today's ceremony is a symbolic event that reveals the level of excellence that we at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education are trying to reach, with the support of our true friends, namely the British Government and the American University of Beirut (AUB), along with the cultural, educational and technological renowned institutions. It is an occasion for us to express our pride of these friendships and fruitful relations, and to express our gratitude to the British and American sides, particularly that the UK is among the leading donors to Lebanon in the educational sector for Lebanese and non-Lebanese.

AUB Provost Dr. Mohamed Harajli said:

We look forward to seeing the impact of this Year of Education being celebrated by the British embassy in Lebanon, with events that will highlight and expand the great work that the UK in Lebanon and the British Council are in this country and the region. We are the American University of Beirut and we all know that America and Britain have a "special relationship" in the world, and we are happy to carry that on between our two organizations.

Albanian applications now open for Chevening scholarships

Chevening Scholarships are awarded to individuals with demonstrable leadership potential who also have strong academic backgrounds. The scholarship offers full financial support for future leaders to study for any eligible master's degree at any UK university whilst also gaining access to a wide range of exclusive academic, professional, and cultural experiences.

Since the programme was created in 1983, over 50,000 outstanding professionals have had the opportunity to develop in the UK through Chevening. There are more than 1,500 scholarships on offer globally for the 2020/2021 academic year, demonstrating the UK's ongoing commitment towards developing the leaders of tomorrow.

Head of Scholarships at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ben Coates, said:

Chevening represents the very best of the UK, welcoming exceptional people from across the world to study, grow, and thrive at some of the world's best universities. Chevening can be a transformative experience, not just for the scholars, but for their communities and countries as they return and use the benefit of their UK experience to make a positive difference in their chosen field.

Our universities promote the creation and exchange of information and ideas, as well as the building of knowledge and networks. Chevening Scholars find themselves immersed in that world, and leave the UK after their studies having grown academically, professionally, and personally as a result.

With our world facing countless challenges, the role that the Chevening community plays in building bridges and collaborating across borders to solve big issues is more important than ever.

Candidates can choose from over 12,000 master's courses at over 150 different higher education institutions. During their year in the UK scholars take part in an exclusive programme of events and activities, enabling them to experience Britain's heritage and history, discuss international policy, and interact with thought leaders at a range of academic, cultural, and social events.

Chevening's Head of Programme Management, Louise Thomson, said:

Recently, scholars have visited the UK prime minister's residence at 10 Downing Street, hiked up Mount Snowdon in Wales, exhibited art in London galleries, interned at the BBC, volunteered with the elderly, debated current affairs at the Cambridge Union, and sat in the home dressing room at Anfield. Some have even visited the locations where scenes from 'Game of Thrones' was shot. All this whilst studying on an intense master's course.

Chevening doesn't just open doors, it opens your mind. You will learn so much simply by interacting with people from all over the world, travelling around the UK in your spare time, and getting involved in the communities you live in. Those who get the most out of the experience are the ones who put the most into it.

HMA to Albania, Duncan Norman, said:

We are looking for ambitious, professional, and innovative future leaders from any walk of life, who will study hard in the UK, and be open to immersing themselves in the opportunities that arise. Chevening Scholars are incredibly diverse, so there is no such thing as a 'typical' scholar. That said, if you have demonstrable leadership qualities and you have a clear vision for the future you want to help shape, you are very likely to fit in with our community of over 50,000 alumni worldwide.

When you return home after your studies you should feel well-equipped to start making a real difference professionally or socially. There is a lot to potentially gain from submitting a thoughtful application, so if you have what it takes to be a Chevening Scholar, I would encourage you to apply before the 5 November deadline.

The call for new applicants follows the selection of sixteen scholars from Albania, who won an award to study at a UK university this year. Successful applicants have been sharing their stories through the #ChosenForChevening hashtag on Twitter and Instagram.

More information

Visit www.chevening.org/scholarships for detailed information on the eligibility criteria and scholarship specifications.

RWM: 'Let's talk about radioactive waste'



RWM at New Scientist Live

Radioactive Waste Management's (RWM) experts recently (10-13 October) attended New Scientist Live (NSL) at Excel, London to help inform visitors about radioactive waste and geological disposal in the UK.

A dedicated mix of around 40 RWM engineers, scientists, researchers and engagement colleagues answered questions and engaged with an estimated 5000 visitors.

Jonathan Martin – Head of Research and Environment at RWM

Jonathan Turner – Chief Geologist at RWM

RWM's exhibition stand was designed to represent four key geological disposal themes – waste, waste packaging, geosphere and engineering, with RWM's experts on-hand to answer questions from families, school children and science enthusiasts.

The RWM stand at New Scientist Live 2019

Using a variety of tools including our virtual reality – a hit with the younger attendees – models, rock samples and full-scale disposal vessels, including a three tonne copper High Heat Generating Waste canister from Sweden, there was plenty on the stand to appeal to all manner of inquisitive minds.

People enjoying the VR equipment at RWMs New Scientist Live stand 2019

RWM's Technical Director Mohammed Sammur, said:

“The event allowed us to showcase RWM as an expert organisation focusing on the science and technology behind geological disposal. We engaged in many positive and constructive discussions and fielded a wide range of questions. We can’t wait to do it all again next year”.

To find out more about our mission to find a suitable site and a willing host community for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) read [here](#).

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1. 1 November 2019 Updated press release
2. 8 October 2019 First published.

[Army and RAF listed as top 100 social mobility employers](#)

The Social Mobility Foundation has this morning published its annual Social Mobility Index, ranking the Army as 55th and the RAF as 76th. The Ministry of Defence has also been listed 35th.

The Social Mobility Index lists organisations that have taken substantial action to improve social mobility in their workplace. The index ranks employers on the actions they are taking to ensure they are open to and accessible to progressing talent from all backgrounds.

As an open and modern employer, the armed forces welcome people from all backgrounds and have been praised for a number of initiatives which help foster social mobility.

The Army has been recognised for a number of activities that have contributed to social mobility, including offering a substantial number of apprenticeships, such as higher-level and degree apprenticeships and having positive role modelling from senior soldiers who are commissioned as late entry officers.

The Army Cadet programme has also been praised for being likely to reach young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In 2017 an independent report from the University of Northampton also found that joining the cadets offers a range of benefits to individuals involved, including social mobility.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

The armed forces are an open and modern employer and welcome anyone to their ranks, whatever their background.

Today's listing demonstrates the positive benefits of a military career and reflects the key principle that the military want to recruit talented individuals who want to serve their country, regardless of where they come from.

The Royal Air Force has also been ranked on the Social Mobility Employer Index at 76th thanks to their extensive outreach to schools, a good range of apprenticeships and a strong recruitment section on the RAF website, with the mock-assessment centre video singled out for praise.

Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation, David Johnston OBE, said:

We are delighted to see more and more employers every year taking part in our Social Mobility Employer Index. The quality of submissions this year meant we have increased the size of our Top list from 50 to 75 and it shows the very wide range of organisations trying to make progress on social mobility.

Whilst no employer would say they have cracked their social mobility challenge, all of the employers in the Top list – along with those that didn't quite make it – should be congratulated for the efforts they're making to ensure their organisation is open to talent from all class backgrounds.