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ENGLISH only

NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR THE FIRST TRIAL OPCW BIOTOXINS PROFICIENCY TEST

1. The Director-General wishes to inform States Parties that the Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) intends to conduct a so-called “First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test”.
2. This First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test constitutes a follow-up to a series of seven exercises on the analysis of biotoxins, organised by the Secretariat between 2016 and 2022. The purpose of these exercises was to build expertise in the analysis of samples of toxins listed in the Chemical Weapons Convention—namely, ricin and saxitoxin—as well as additional toxins, such as abrin, that are also relevant in cases of alleged use of chemical weapons. These exercises were not intended to be a test of current laboratory proficiency, but rather a means for various laboratories and the Secretariat to examine the specific requirements for toxin identification.
3. Encouraged by the improvement in the expertise and performance of laboratories over the course of seven years of biotoxin analysis exercises, and following the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB-37/1, dated 1 September 2023) and its Temporary Working Group on the Analysis of Biotoxins (Annex 2 to SAB-37/1), the Secretariat now considers it appropriate to organise a trial proficiency test to facilitate the establishment of an official OPCW proficiency test for biotoxin analysis.
4. The First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test, which will focus on saxitoxin—a low-molecular-weight toxin—is tentatively scheduled for the second half of August 2024.
5. States Parties should notify the OPCW Laboratory by 1 July 2024 of the nomination of any laboratory wishing to take part in the First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test. The nomination form (annexed hereto) should be completed and sent via email attachment (biotoxin@opcw.org). Nominations should be endorsed by the National Authority of the State Party in which the laboratory is located. Participating laboratories are requested to arrange internal customs clearance procedures for the samples in order to prevent any unnecessary delays in the sample delivery process.
6. The First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test will be conducted in line with the quality management system documents based on International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission standard ISO/IEC 17043. A set comprising one standard operating procedure (SOP) and three Working Instructions (WIs) will be shared with participants of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh

Exercises on the Analysis of Biotoxins in February 2024 for feedback. These documents will include the reporting format and evaluation criteria. Final versions of the SOP and WIs will be shared with the participants of the First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test prior to the actual test.

7. Participants will be requested to submit analysis reports within 15 calendar days of receiving the samples.
8. This First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test is intended to be a first step towards establishing an official proficiency test for biotoxin analysis. Participation in the First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test or in the prospective proficiency test for biotoxin analysis is voluntary, and is neither related to nor replaces the requirements applicable to laboratories that wish to obtain or retain designated status for the analysis of authentic environmental or biomedical samples in accordance with, inter alia, decision EC-XX/DEC.3 (dated 28 June 2000), which stipulates the requirement for designated laboratories to demonstrate once per calendar year that they have maintained their capabilities in a proficiency test organised by the Secretariat, unless the additional guidelines in the Annex to decision C-20/DEC.4 (dated 2 December 2015) are applicable.
9. States Parties are invited to nominate laboratories that are interested in biotoxin sample analysis and/or have expertise in that field to participate in the First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test. Nomination is not limited to laboratories that have previously participated in the biotoxin analysis exercises or in official OPCW proficiency tests.

Annex: First Trial OPCW Biotoxins Proficiency Test – Nomination Form

Annex**FIRST TRIAL OPCW BIOTOXINS PROFICIENCY TEST****NOMINATION FORM**

Please submit the completed form to the OPCW Laboratory **by 1 July 2024**
via email attachment to **biotoxin@opcw.org**

Name of laboratory	
Address of laboratory	
Nature of work related to the Chemical Weapons Convention	
Quality system management and accreditation body (if any)	
Full sample delivery address (if different from the laboratory address)	
Special requirements for sample delivery (e.g., customs requirements, preferred courier agency)	
Primary contact person's name, telephone number, and email address	
Second contact person's name, telephone number, and email address	
Name, signature, and affiliation of the person nominating the laboratory	
Approval of the National Authority (official seal and signature)	