




AUSTRALIA

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Sixth Review Conference

**Statement by H.E. Ms Caroline Millar
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Mr President,

Allow me to begin by congratulating you on your appointment.

My delegation looks forward to working with you to ensure this meeting concludes successfully and substantively.

In the current, challenging international environment the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention faces unprecedented challenges.

The threat of terrorist groups developing or acquiring biological weapons is real. The consequences could be devastating.

And rapid advances in life sciences and the availability of hazardous materials are increasing the lethal threat of biological weapons.

Some states parties to the Convention continue to pursue BW programs, while other states still have not joined the Convention.

It is therefore imperative that this Conference strengthen the BWC and ensure its effectiveness against these threats and challenges.

With this in mind, Australia, in consultation with partners, has identified five means of strengthening the Convention:

- establishing an action plan to universalise and ensure its full implementation
- as part of this, ensuring coordinated national implementation through appointment of a national BWC focal point
- comprehensively reviewing Confidence Building Measures to improve their value and participation
- convening intersessional work to boost national implementation
- and establishing a BWC implementation support unit.

Universalisation and implementation

Mr President

A BWC short of universal adherence and less than fully implemented can not be fully effective against the threat from biological weapons and those who would acquire them

At this meeting, States Parties need to agree an action plan to universalise the Convention and ensure its full implementation...

...to enhance international security and...

...to help states meet their obligations to counter bio-terrorism under UNSCR 1540 and 1673.

Australia and others have proposed such plans. Key elements should include:

- calling on all states not party to ratify or accede to the BWC without delay and, meantime, adhere voluntarily to its provisions
- using bilateral, regional and multilateral contacts with non-parties to promote adherence
- providing assistance, where possible, to states seeking to ratify or accede to the BWC on developing national legislation
- assisting states parties to implement national legislation and penal measures, pursuant to obligations in Articles III and IV
- calling on states to appoint a national focal point to coordinate domestic implementation.

Effective national implementation has been a focus of Australia's promotion of the Convention and its aims in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia has co-hosted with Indonesia regional workshops in 2005 and this year.

These workshops discussed national legislation, enhanced security of pathogens and toxins, bio-defence and surveillance, codes of conduct for scientists and the role of the BWC against bio-terrorism.

Australia has also assisted with the national implementation of disease surveillance strategies in our region – most notably for SARS and avian influenza.

Robust frameworks that protect human, animal and plant health are fundamental to national health.

But they are also vital to national and international security.

For as globalisation intensifies, weak disease surveillance, reporting and control in one state can affect the security of all states.

Increased transparency

Mr President

Effective national implementation must be reinforced through greater transparency between states parties.

Australia regrets that the 2001 Review Conference was unable to agree on a legally-binding verification mechanism for the BWC.

In its absence, the Convention's CBM system is important to ensuring greater transparency between states.

But the CBM system needs reviewing and strengthening at this Conference and, if necessary, in our subsequent intersessional work.

In particular, we must boost the low participation rate which is a fundamental weakness in the system.

A national focal point to coordinate CBM reporting could assist in this.

As would a modest BWC implementation support unit that coordinated, collected and disseminated CBMs electronically.

Moreover, an ISU could usefully coordinate states' needs and offers of implementation assistance and act as a BWC-wide point of contact.

Indeed the value of an ISU is such that it should be agreed at this meeting for the coming intersessional period.

Intersessional work

Mr President

At the end of this Conference, our work will not be complete.

Conventions do not implement themselves – they require constant and practical efforts to meet the challenges of an evolving strategic and scientific environment.

This Conference must agree an intersessional work program that will ensure the Convention's full and effective implementation.

We should focus our intersessional work to enhance the Convention's capacity to respond new challenges, especially bio-terrorism.

Topics on national implementation, bio-security and bio-safety would strengthen the BWC.

And they would help states meet their obligation to counter bio-terrorism under UNSCR 1540 and 1673.

Mr President

Australia will present greater detail on its proposals in the article-by-article review.

We look forward to working with others to ensuring the BWC as an effective bulwark against bio-terrorism and other BW threats.

I thank you.