

BWC Meeting of States Parties (1-5 December 2008)

Brief for the Chairman – Opening Session (10:00 1 December)

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say a few words about the substantive part of our work, and the outcome of this meeting. The Meeting of Experts showed that States Parties continue to approach our various challenges in a collaborative, collegial spirit, and the wealth of material presented at that meeting shows the impressive resources we can muster when we work in concert.

We now have to distil the excellent work of the Meeting of Experts into a more concentrated product. We have a vast amount of pertinent, constructive material to work with: what we need now is refinement, structure and focus. We will be working on the same basis as in previous years, on the same understandings about the scope of our mandate. Our task is to "promote common understanding and effective action", not to negotiate binding agreements. All views and perspectives are welcome. We are not trying to exclude any points of view. States Parties will have different priorities, but all these can be reflected in a fair and transparent manner.

Given the broad scope of our two topics, and the large amount of material presented at the Meeting of Experts and reflected in the synthesis paper, I would suggest that we try to structure our discussion and focus on the key elements of common interest. This discussion could follow the outline of the synthesis paper – although I again stress that additional or revised ideas are also welcome. By focusing our discussion on the key elements of our two topics, I hope we

will be able to develop a report which genuinely helps States Parties to take effective action on our two topics.

As Chairman, I am eager to ensure that the outcome of our work this year makes a lasting contribution to the efforts of States Parties – and other relevant actors – to take practical measures to strengthen the Convention and help ensure the safe and secure development of the peaceful applications of biological science and technology. Our mandate is clear: we are certainly not attempting to negotiate binding agreements. But I believe that we would make a significant and practical contribution to fulfilling the objectives of the Convention if we could develop a report which, for example:

- clearly states what we mean by biosafety and biosecurity in the context of the Convention;
- outlines the need for proportional measures, for carefully assessing risks, for balancing security concerns against the need for nurturing research and ensuring the peaceful development of biological science and technology;
- recognizes that "no one size fits all", that individual and local circumstances must be taken into account when addressing biosafety/biosecurity and education and awareness-raising;
- encourages the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including government, the scientific community, commercial industry and academia; and, perhaps most importantly,
- lists practical measures that States Parties can consider and draw upon when developing their own approaches to our topics.

These are just examples: there are of course many other themes and ideas that might usefully be included in our report. But I do urge you take advantage of the constructive atmosphere we have developed, to produce a report that will be a useful and practical resource for all those who share our goals of strengthening the Convention, improving biosafety and biosecurity capacities worldwide, raising awareness of biological risks, and reducing the threat posed to global security by biological weapons and bioterrorism.

I would also like to remind you that later in the week, we will be considering the universalization of the Convention, and the report of the Implementation Support Unit, including the report on participation in the confidence-building measures (CBMs). I encourage all delegations to prepare for this discussion, by reading the respective documents, and being ready to report on your own activities.

That is all I have to say by way of introduction. I am looking forward to a productive and focused meeting, and to working with you all to deliver a useful, practical and concrete outcome. I encourage all delegations to contribute freely to the debate, and I hope we will see a continuation of the very constructive and creative spirit States Parties displayed at the Meeting of Experts.
