

STATEMENT

BY THE

SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE

2008 MEETING OF STATES PARTIES

TO THE

BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION

1 DECEMBER 2008

Thank your Chairperson,

Firstly, please allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of the 2008 Meeting of States Parties of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and to assure you of my delegation's full support for your endeavours in this regard. I would furthermore like to congratulate you, Chairperson, on the way in which you managed the 2008 Meeting of Experts resulting in its very successful outcome.

I would also like to congratulate and thank your predecessor, Ambassador Masood Kahn of Pakistan for the exemplary way in which he led the BTWC meetings during the two previous years.

Mr Chairperson,

As I alluded to earlier, in my delegation's assessment, the 2008 Meeting of Experts was one of the most successful to date. Your excellent synthesis paper is a very useful document that can definitely assist all of us as States Parties in our implementation of the Convention.

The topics of national, regional and international measures to improve bio-safety and bio-security; and oversight, education, awareness raising, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct remain important in our efforts to ensure that life sciences are not used for malicious purposes. The extent of participation in the Meeting of Experts bears testimony to this fact, as I am sure our discussions during this meeting will do as well.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa would like to reiterate its position, that in the developing world, the establishment of bio-safety in terms of safe laboratory practices is the first priority. It is our view that bio-safety forms the basis of bio-security. Most measures taken to ensure the integrity of samples by laboratories, as well as the measures taken to protect laboratory personnel and members of the public who may live or work in the vicinity of the laboratory automatically have bio-security spin-offs. We are convinced that bio-risk is posed firstly by naturally occurring disease, secondly by the unintentional exposure of people to disease and only thirdly by obtaining pathogens illegally. This appears to have been proven by the fact that the vast majority, if not all of biological incidents that have taken place over the last 5 years were due to the unintentional exposure of people to biological pathogens, caused by problems related to bio-safety.

In Africa, our primary concern in the biological field is the natural outbreak of diseases and the urgent need to develop human and infrastructural capacity to allow for the necessary diagnostic capabilities and bio-safety practices across the continent.

South Africa therefore calls for a concerted effort to be made to first improve bio-safety internationally and for our efforts to improve bio-security to be built on the basis of bio-safety.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa has taken note of the valuable information that has so far been shared on the issues of awareness raising and codes of conduct. We will be analysing these for possible application in our own country. We recognise that it is vital for all stake-holders such as states, professional associations, academics, research funders and non-governmental organisations to promote the responsible and ethical use of science in all circumstances. It is particularly important to make scientists aware of the dual-use nature of their work, and inform them of the ways in which they can anticipate and resolve ethical problems and risks.

We look forward to a successful and interactive meeting.

I thank you.