

STATEMENT

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TO

MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE

CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT,

PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL

(BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

Monday, 1 December 2008

Mr Chairman, Secretary-General, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a great honour to be invited to make a Statement to the Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) which I am doing on behalf of the Department of Peace Studies of the University of Bradford in Yorkshire in the United Kingdom and with the explicit endorsement of the Vice Chancellor of the University. We consider that this Meeting of States Parties in its consideration of:

(iii) National, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins;

(iv) Oversight, education, awareness raising and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention;

is addressing two topics of particular importance in regard to the effective implementation of the BTWC.

Mr. Chairman

The Meeting of Experts held under your Chairmanship on 18 to 22 August 2008 to prepare for this Meeting of States Parties was a particularly effective meeting at which all the participants benefited greatly from the statements and presentations made by the many experts as this enabled all to better understand the challenges faced in the common goal of strengthening the implementation of the Convention. We welcome your synthesis paper of 10 October 2008 in which you have reflected the ideas put forward at the Meeting of Experts in a coherent, concise and accessible way.

In preparing for this Meeting of States Parties, we would recommend that the material in your synthesis paper should be developed and enhanced in arriving at language for inclusion in the report of the meeting. In regard to **biosafety and biosecurity**, we welcome the language in the synthesis document on building capacity in which it is stated in paragraph 6 subparagraph (i) that:

... States Parties should (i) Work with the relevant international organisations such as WHO, FAO and OIE, in particular through their relevant laboratory capacity building programmes, to strengthen the ability and capacity of national public health, veterinary and agricultural services;

However, we would recommend that this be extended so as to include a specific reference to the capacity building programme in biosafety that is a central element of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety:

Article 22 of the Protocol requires Parties to cooperate in the development and strengthening of capacities in biosafety, including through existing organizations and through private sector involvement. Such cooperation includes, inter alia, scientific and technical training and the enhancement of technological capacities in biosafety.

[See <http://www.cbd.int/biosafety/issues/cap-build.shtml>]

Likewise in regard to risk assessment and management, we recommend that the language in subparagraph (iii) of paragraph 8:

8. Recognising the value of using a risk management approach to developing and implementing effective biosafety and biosecurity measures, States Parties should:

(iii) Take advantage, where appropriate, of guidance and assistance provided by relevant international organizations, and involve key stakeholders from the scientific and technology communities;

should be extended to include a specific reference to the risk assessment and risk management programmes that are carried out under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

The Biosafety Protocol ... sets out, in Annex III general principles, methodological steps, and points to consider in the conduct of risk assessment. The general principles include, among others, the following concepts: Risk assessment should be carried out in a scientifically sound and transparent manner; Lack of scientific knowledge or scientific consensus should not necessarily be interpreted as indicating a particular level of risk, an absence of risk, or an acceptable risk; Risks should be considered in the context of risks posed by the non-modified recipients or parental organisms; and that Risks should be assessed on a case-by-base basis.

and also

The Protocol, in Article 16, requires Parties to adopt measures and strategies for preventing adverse effects and for managing and controlling risks identified by risk assessments.

[See <http://www.cbd.int/biosafety/issues/risk.shtml>]

In regard to **education and awareness-raising**, we welcome the comprehensive scope of the language in paragraph 10 of the synthesis paper and the guidance in subparagraph 11 (i) that *States Parties should:*

(i) Establish formal requirements in relevant scientific and engineering training programmes and continuing professional education, such as mandatory seminars, modules or courses;

From the studies that the Department of Peace Studies has carried out during the last few years, it is evident that all those engaged in the life sciences have a responsibility to carry out their activities in a safe and responsible manner that will not cause harm to humankind, animals and plants. They need without exception to have had training and been educated in the dual-use nature of the life sciences so that they are aware of the risks associated with the life sciences in the broadest sense including but not limited to the obligations of this Convention.

We urge that the aim should be an internationally agreed requirement for all those engaged in the life sciences to have been qualified appropriately by having undertaken a course in the risks associated with the dual-use nature of the life sciences.

In regard to **codes of conduct**, we regret that the language in paragraph 11 of the synthesis paper is not as comprehensive as that already mentioned in paragraph 10. Codes of conduct need to apply to all those engaged in the life sciences and not solely to *scientific research* especially when it is appreciated that an activity that is regarded as research in one country may be regarded as development or exploratory development in another. The preambular paragraph on codes needs to be comprehensive embracing **all** those engaged in **all activities** in the life sciences.

We welcome the guidance in paragraph 13 (i) which states that:

States Parties should encourage stakeholders to ensure that codes of conduct require those to whom they apply to:

(i) Comply with relevant international and national legislation and regulations, ...

and recommend that this be extended to call on those to whom the codes apply both comply and **be perceived to comply** with relevant international and national legislation and regulations. Such an extension will greatly aid to assist in building confidence between States Parties that they are in compliance with the Convention.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Representatives, we urge you to demonstrate what you can do at this Meeting of States Parties to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention through more effective measures in biosafety and biosecurity as well as in oversight, education, awareness raising and codes of conduct to implement the Convention in each and every State Party. It is through such action that you can help to ensure that all of us can benefit from the beneficial advances in the life sciences whilst reducing the risks thereby enabling us all to live in a safer and more secure world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.