26 April 2016 | Preparatory Committee for the 8th Review Conference of the BTWC

Statement by H.E. Mr. Henk Cor van der Kwast, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Conference on Disarmament

Mr. Chairman,

Let me start by congratulating you on your election as Chair of this Preparatory Committee and as President-designate of the 8th Review Conference. Let me assure you that you have the full confidence of my delegation in making your Chairmanship and Presidency a success. We stand ready to assist you in any way we can.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to the statement by the European Union, the Netherlands wishes to make the following remarks.

As we are all defining our hopes and expectations for the 8th RevCon here today, let me quote my predecessor and Chair of the 7th Review Conference, Ambassador Paul van den IJssel, when he defined his in 2010: “A positive outcome means two things: consensus, but also ambition. I hope we all agree that we should be guided by ambition when we are determining our aims for the RevCon. At the same time we should keep an eye on what is doable and realistic.”

These words still stand true today. The main aim of the Netherlands for the 8th RevCon is to secure such a positive outcome that further strengthens the Convention. In our view, this outcome should contain the following elements.

1) Supporting national implementation

Biological threats and risks continue to evolve. If we are to internationally contain those risks, it is essential to strengthen national implementation of the Convention, such as through creating criminal legislation or establishing appropriate biosafety and biosecurity measures. In this light, the provision of assistance to states in need of technical and/or legislative support is crucial.

2) Enhancing compliance of the Convention by building confidence

In the absence of a binding verification protocol, it is important to build confidence in compliance and enhance information sharing between States Parties. The inter-sessional process has identified innovative approaches to strengthen compliance and enhance national implementation. Voluntary, but
Concrete and bottom-up mechanisms for States Parties to show their compliance are needed to accomplish this.

3) Promoting universality
The ultimate goal is to have a universally legally binding Convention. Therefore, it is essential to reach out to those states that have not yet legally committed themselves to the non-proliferation and disarmament of biological and toxin weapons.

4) Incorporating developments in Science and Technology
Rapid and significant developments in the life sciences are accompanied by growing concerns about possible misuse of life sciences for terrorist or criminal purposes. Dual-use research poses biosecurity risks. Therefore, advances in biological science and technology should be taken into account in the proceedings of the BTWC. Governments as well as the scientific community have a collective responsibility that scientific advances will only be used in support of peace, security and development. Therefore, we must continuously and constructively engage scientific experts in the Convention.

5) Raising biosecurity awareness and promoting bottom-up capacity building
Education and awareness raising in the scientific community on dual-use issues should be one of the key topics. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Science (KNAW) developed a code of conduct for biosecurity, to help individual researchers in their assessment of risks and benefits. Moreover, Netherlands Biosecurity Office serves to increase awareness and functions as a link between policy-makers and scientific professionals. The main objectives are to develop tools to help organizations implement biosecurity and create awareness among biosecurity stakeholders.

6) Strengthening the ISU
The Netherlands supports strengthening the role of the ISU, such as prolonging its mandate, expanding its staff and strengthening its tasks in the implementation of the next inter-sessional work programme.

Proposals
With regard to the various proposals that have been put forward in the context of this PrepCom, the Netherlands wishes to thank those states for their initiatives.

Several proposals have been put forward to enlarge the engagement of scientific experts and create a more structured arrangement for reviewing S&T developments within the framework of the BTWC. These are objectives the Netherlands fully supports. We hope that the preparatory process will allow substantive discussion on these proposals, with the aim of converging similar proposals into one. NL believes it to be important for such a structure to render specialized advice to States Parties regarding developments in Science and Technology relevant to the Convention. Considering the rapidly evolving developments, such a structure should be flexible in its focus. Moreover, it is important for it to be open and geographically diverse.
Lastly, NL wishes to stress the Peer Review mechanism as a concrete and innovative initiative to enhance national implementation, to improve compliance through confidence-building and increased transparency amongst States Parties and to strengthen international cooperation while respecting national sovereignty. Previous Peer Review exercises in France and the BENELUX countries have proven to be valuable to increase awareness amongst national stakeholders and provide for a mutual learning experience.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by saying that the Netherlands is committed to working closely with all States Parties in a constructive manner in order to secure a positive outcome at the Review Conference that further strengthens the Convention.

Thank you.