

**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**

4 December 2018

English only

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**2018 Meeting****Geneva, 4–7 December 2018**

Item 8(b) of the revised agenda

**Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations,  
including possible outcomes****Meeting of Experts on Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to  
the Convention**

**Meeting of Experts on Review of Developments in the Field  
of Science and Technology Related to the Convention:  
Reflections and proposals for possible outcomes**

**Submitted by the Chair of the Meeting of Experts on Review of  
Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the  
Convention**

## **I. Main elements**

1. MSP/2017 decided to convene Meetings of Experts on “Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention” (MX2), part of the Intersessional Program (ISP) 2017-2020 of the BWC. The MX2 session held in August 2018 provided an opportunity for fruitful dialogue between scientists and policymakers under the framework of the ISP, in which contemporary S&T issues potentially of concern to the BWC were discussed at length in a manner that was both interactive and comprehensive. Many delegations highlighted that the new MX format allowed for more in-depth discussions of these issues.

2. It is recognized that the rapid pace of scientific and technological development, especially recent breakthroughs in microbiology, bring welcomed advances to such industries as pharmaceuticals and agriculture. However, the dual use dimension of technologies such as gene editing, gene drives, and gene synthesis raises concerns about the potential for their malicious uses and applications in violation of the BWC. In this context, a sizeable part of discussions was dedicated to regulatory and ethical issues associated with the risks and potential threats represented by these new technologies. The unintended effects of technologies that are swiftly being adopted by industries were also pointed out as an area of potential risk, as well as the activities of a large number of amateur biologists (“do-it-yourself communities”) that have no established governmental, academic or private sector affiliation, and therefore work outside the purview of any official regulation.

3. These cutting-edge technologies emerge in an international landscape that is marked by a persistent gap between the respective capabilities of developed and developing countries, an asymmetry that could be aggravated by the growing perception of risks associated with their potential misuse. Whilst some delegations focused on security concerns alone; others stressed the importance of unhampered access to new technologies



for developing countries. The risks of an accidental release or deliberate use a biological weapon were discussed under these perspectives, and resilient health systems were considered the best coping mechanisms.

## II. The way forward

4. The Chair of MX2 was requested to present this Conference Room Paper in his personal capacity along with his views on how these issues could be tackled, including reflections on possible outcomes for the 2018 MSP. It is the Chair's view that, while there was convergence on the importance for the BWC of keeping under consideration new technological developments in areas associated with the Convention's field of application, future discussions and outcomes regarding further activities of the ISP should focus on issues that achieved greater commonality of approaches among delegations. In this regard, two areas could be explored: (i) risk assessment and management, and (ii) a voluntary code of conduct for biological scientists and relevant personnel.

5. S&T developments pose challenges in the areas of biosecurity and biosafety, requiring further discussions on how these challenges affect countries with different levels of development. Proposals for coordinated responses, if needed, should carefully examine the experiences of other relevant international instruments which could serve as valid examples for further work within the framework of the BWC. Such a discussion should include capacity-building on biosafety and biosecurity through the effective implementation of Article X.

6. A recurring debate took place during MX2 on how to strike the right balance between ethics and scientific freedom, in a context in which innovative technologies are being developed outside the reach of current regulations. Notwithstanding the existence of national and professional codes of conduct, or similar instruments as ethical guidelines, several delegations expressed interest in discussing a "Code of Conduct" within the Intersessional Programme of the BWC, under a negotiation process led by States Parties which would allow for the participation of the scientific community and other relevant players.

7. The Chair sees the two topics above as those that could lead to a meaningful discussion during the remaining meetings of the ISP, in 2019 and 2020. They seem to present the best prospect for an agreed outcome on S&T issues in the 2021 Review Conference of the BWC. The Meeting of Experts on Science and Technology is the available format for discussions, but State Parties should not rule out other possibilities, such as working groups in parallel and complementary to MX2.

8. This proposal is an effort to move discussions forward on practical and institutional issues within the scope and mandate of the ISP while avoiding a selective focus on specific technologies and scientific areas. The challenging swell of groundbreaking scientific knowledge and technologies in areas of significance to the BWC recommends clarity, flexibility and pragmatism on the way forward in order to avoid open-ended discussions on certain technologies, in and of themselves, which may not be a reality or a priority for some years still to come.

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