

**EIGHTH REVIEW CONFERENCE 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**

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To the Permanent Representatives of the States Parties
and Signatories to the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction

21 March 2016

Excellency,

I am writing once more in my capacity as President-Designate of the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to outline the ongoing preparations for our first meeting of the year, the meeting of the Preparatory Committee that will take place from 26 to 27 April in Geneva. In this regard, I would also like to thank the Regional Group Coordinators for organizing another round of regional group briefings in Geneva on 5 April, and I look forward to seeing many of you then.

Preparations for the Preparatory Committee

Election of officials

As was discussed during the previous regional group briefings on 8 February, the Preparatory Committee will need to elect two Vice-Chairmen, one from the Western Group and one from the Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States. Those appointed will serve as Vice-Chairmen during the Preparatory Committee meetings in April and August. Following BWC practice, they will then go on to become the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee at the Review Conference itself. In line with the rotation of posts among the regional groups, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole will come from the Western Group, and the Chairman of the Drafting Committee will come from the Group of Non-Aligned and Other States.

Looking ahead to the Review Conference itself, we will also establish a Credentials Committee which, in line with past practice, will be chaired by a representative from the Eastern European Group. The Review Conference will also need 20 Vice-Presidents – ten from the Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States, six from the Western Group and four from the Eastern European Group. Furthermore, the Committee of the Whole and the Drafting Committee both require two Vice-Chairmen in line with past practice, while the Credentials Committee requires one Vice-Chairman. I encourage the regional groups to start reflecting on their nominations for the available positions.

Provisional agenda

We had an initial exchange of views on the provisional agenda of the Preparatory Committee during the first round of regional group briefings at which time the draft received general support. The formal version has been available in all official languages for several weeks on the BWC website as document BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/1. As you will see from this provisional agenda, and as decided at the MSP last December, the Preparatory Committee in April will hear a general exchange of views (agenda item 5). In this regard, I would like to once again encourage States Parties to submit proposals as early as possible, and to be prepared to present them during this general exchange of views. Of course, this does not preclude proposals being submitted at a later stage as well.

Organization of the Review Conference

As I mentioned in my letter dated 27 January, the Preparatory Committee meeting in April will have an initial discussion of agenda item 6 on organization of the Review Conference. In order to facilitate this discussion, I have prepared a provisional agenda for the Review Conference and the provisional rules of procedure. These are now available in all official languages on the BWC website as documents BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/L.1 and BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/L.2 respectively. The rules of procedure that will guide the conduct of the Review Conference are identical to those from previous Review Conferences, indeed they have remained unchanged for many years. The provisional agenda is identical to the agenda adopted by the Seventh Review Conference, except for a necessary change in the title of agenda item 12 to replace the word "Sixth" with the word "Seventh". I have submitted this provisional agenda in order to serve as a basis for discussion under agenda item 6 of the Preparatory Committee's agenda, but it is purely provisional and I imagine that we may well revise it in the light of our discussions in April and August after which a revised version can be circulated.

I would also like to briefly return to two issues which were raised at the regional group briefings in February. The first relates to the issue of background papers for the Review Conference. As you will recall, the list of eight background papers produced by the ISU at the Seventh Review Conference was annexed to my previous letter. At the regional group briefings, we heard proposals for two additional background papers, one on developments in relation to the implementation of Article VII of the Convention and one on financial implications of proposals for follow-up action after the Review Conference. I would like to kindly request States Parties to give further consideration to this issue so that, at the April meeting, we can ask the ISU to begin preparing the necessary background papers. Again, this does not preclude the possibility of requesting additional background papers at a later date, but we must bear in mind the time taken to draft such papers, as well as the time for translation and production.

The second issue is the suggestion that we make time at the August meeting for an informal session in which we can hear brief statements by NGOs, as we have done at previous intersessional meetings. If we resume the general exchange of views at the August meeting, one approach could be to move into an informal session upon the completion of the exchange of views among States Parties. I would appreciate hearing the views of delegations on this suggestion at the upcoming regional group briefings.

Other issues

Universalization

It is my hope that, in this year of the Eighth Review Conference, we can make additional efforts to encourage States not yet party to the BWC to join our Convention. In a few weeks time, on 26 March, we will mark the 41st anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC, an opportune time to refocus our efforts on this important objective. I am encouraged that both Angola and Cote d'Ivoire appear to be very close to joining the Convention, and I recently sent remarks to a parliamentary roundtable in Nepal where good progress is also being made towards ratification. The Foreign Minister of Hungary will send a letter to his counterparts in the 23 States not party to the BWC encouraging them to join. Furthermore, I plan to travel to New York in the coming months and intend to brief the Secretary-General of the United Nations on preparations for the Review Conference and to invite him to attend the meeting. I will also seek his assistance in promoting the universalization of the Convention and I invite all States Parties to encourage those yet to do so, particularly those in their own regions, to join the BWC. While in New York, I will also meet representatives of States Parties not represented in Geneva and of States not yet party to the BWC.

Sponsorship programme

The BWC sponsorship programme, which was established by the Seventh Review Conference in order to support and increase the participation of developing States Parties in BWC meetings, plays an important role in widening participation in our meetings. I recall that several States Parties indicated a willingness to contribute to the programme this year and I would therefore encourage any States Parties in a position to do so to consider making voluntary contributions to fund this programme. In this respect, I would like to express appreciation to Australia and to the European Union for their commitment to support the programme. States Parties wishing to make a contribution should contact the ISU to discuss the practicalities at the earliest opportunity in order to make most efficient use of the funds available. The ISU will shortly circulate instructions on how to apply for sponsorship under the programme in 2016.

As always, although I am not based in Geneva, I am very willing to be contacted either directly or via the Permanent Mission of Hungary in Geneva in order to discuss the preparations for the Review Conference. I intend to continue to work in an open and inclusive manner to maintain the unity of purpose that has characterized our work to date. My plan is to hold another round of regional group consultations the day before the Preparatory Committee on 25 April, and I will be available for consultations for that entire week.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Ambassador Dr György Molnár
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Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of
Hungary
President-Designate of the Eighth Review
Conference