1 Participation

1.1 The first regional workshop preparing for the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 15 and 16 June 2016. It targeted BWC States Parties in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. 51 persons participated in the workshop.

1.2 Regional States Parties present (9): Afghanistan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan (host country), Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

1.3 EU Member States – Local representation (6+1): Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom, as well as the European Union Delegation (EUDEL)

1.4 International Organisations (3): European External Action Service (EEAS), UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) – Geneva Branch

1.5 Civil society (2): University of Bradford (United Kingdom), University of Sussex (United Kingdom)

1.6 Observer State Parties (1): United States

2 Meeting organisation

The workshop took place in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.
2.1 Wednesday, 15 June

Mr Yerzhan Ashikbayev (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan) welcomed the participants. He listed universalisation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), its full implementation, including submission of the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), and addressing the threat of terrorism with biological weapons (BW) as major future issues. He noted Kazakhstan’s unilateral closure of the Soviet BW complex in Stepnogorsk as well as three former dual-use production plants and the growing role of biotechnology in the country’s development. In this context he referred to the needs for biosafety and -security and the collaboration with the United States in building a central reference laboratory. In his opening speech Dr Kamen Velichkov (Acting Head, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan) highlighted the European Union’s role in disarmament and non-proliferation and the financial support the EU gives to UN initiatives in this area. Ambassador Dr György Molnár (Hungary, President-Designate of the Eighth BWC Review Conference) referred to the stakes involved in the Eighth Review Conference. He described how States Parties had agreed to a novel approach by having two sessions of the Preparatory Committee, which has allowed States Parties to present their proposals ahead of the Review Conference.

In the first substantive session of the morning, Mr Daniel Feakes (Chief, BWC Implementation Support Unit) described the status of the BWC and gave a detailed briefing on the review process. Dr Emil Kazakov (Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Export Control Division, EEAS) next discussed EU Council Decision 2016/51 (CFSP), situated it in the EU’s overall strategy on disarmament and proliferation prevention and described the additional projects foreseen for the period 2016–19 under the funding decision. Mr Feakes then concluded the morning with a detailed review of the 2012–15 intersessional meetings and listing possible topics that may feature high in the Review Conference discussions in November.

The afternoon started off with a discussion round moderated by Dr Jean Pascal Zanders (Political Affairs Officer, UNODA - Geneva Branch) on States Parties’ views on how to take the BWC forward. Themes touched upon include the lack of commitment of some States Parties to fully implement the BWC, the lack of a verification regime, uncertainty what compliance entails, the place of the BWC in the future security constellation, how to best identify needs for support and international cooperation, future roles and composition of the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), and risks posed by so-called biohackers. Several participants
commented on the lack of substantive progress during the previous intersessional series of meetings. Some interveners also made reference to a greater need for regional approaches to several issues.

The first thematic session focussed on the review of science and technology. **Mr Vladimir Ladanov** (Counsellor, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia) introduced a discussion note on the subject matter. He emphasised the importance of assessing the impact of science and technology on the BWC and referred to the Russian proposal to have a Scientific Advisory Committee established for the period of 2017-2021 by the Eighth Review Conference. Its purpose would be to assess developments in scientific and technological fields relevant to the Convention, and to report and provide relevant recommendations to States Parties. The Committee would comprise 20–25 experts appointed by States Parties through their regional groups.

The next session featured three speakers on the theme of the contribution of biorisk management to strengthening implementation of the BWC. **Dr Abylay Sansyzbay** (Director, Research Institute for Biological Safety Problems, Kazakhstan) provided an overview of the various biorisk management procedures Kazakhstan has adopted in light of expanding activities in the life sciences and biotechnology. He also pointed to the training of relevant staff and their participation in international conferences and publications in high-impact journals. **Professor Lela Bakanidze** (Georgian Biosafety Association, Georgia) described biorisk management as a full spectrum, holistic and multifaceted approach that involves not only public health workers and scientists, but also law enforcement and defence. It ties human and animal health to security issues. It benefits from international cooperation. In Georgia development and implementation of biorisk management policies involves different ministries. There they also serve as a detection tool for illicit activities and different instruments are available to prosecute and penalise persons engaging in them. **Dr Tatyana Novossiolova** (University of Bradford, United Kingdom) addressed the contribution of education outreach and codes of conduct to national implementation. She gave an overview of the different projects in former Soviet republics and elsewhere in which she has been involved. She stressed the importance of reaching out to the future generations, which means that certain activities should already be directed to 16–17-year olds. Referring to the Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach set up by the Scientific Advisory Board of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical
Weapons (OPCW), she expressed the need for BWC States Parties to consider similar cooperation and work in this field.

2.2 Thursday, 16 June

In the third thematic session Ambassador Molnár described progress towards universalisation of the BWC. He highlighted the steps he, as well as the Hungarian Government, are undertaking to engage with states not yet party to the BWC and the responsibilities of all States parties towards achieving that goal. He focussed on challenges still remaining to catch up with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, citing Africa and the Middle East as two regions requiring a lot of work still.

The fourth thematic session looked at assistance and cooperation by States Parties to prevent or in response to disease outbreaks. Mr Richard Balliram (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, US Department of Health and Human Services) described a US project on trying to acquire insights from the 2014–16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa on how the international community might respond under Article VII of the BWC if such an incident were the consequence of a deliberate release of a pathogen. The survey and research revealed several problems for international assistance should an outbreak be determined to have been deliberate: reluctance of many types of assistance providers to be involved, rise in insurance premiums, the position of funders of operations, role of the military and so on. The situation may also raise capacity issues if such an outbreak were to be initiated in multiple locations across different borders or occur in an area without central government control. Colonel Mariana Grama (National Point of Contact for BWC, Moldova) expressed some surprise as to why states wish to organise international assistance through formal arrangements such as decision-making via the UN Security Council. It amounts to saying that emergency assistance is political and difficult to organise. Such assistance is often provided as necessary in a bilateral context based on a humanitarian imperative. She believes that the BWC States Parties should recognise existing instruments to respond as a contribution to article VII and to establish a good cooperative mechanisms. The World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Health Regulations (IHR) and the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) should be central in BWC considerations. States Parties could begin by declaring the resources they are prepared to commit to emergency assistance. A database maintained by the ISU could collect all the proposals. Col. Grama then proceeded to outline how Moldova has organised its international assistance
preparedness and how it has been involved in various missions, including in Africa.

Dr James Revill (University of Sussex, UK) began the fifth thematic session with a presentation on enhancing transparency and confidence in compliance. With regard to compliance he distinguished between negative and positive obligations, i.e., actions States Parties cannot undertake, such as acquiring BW of hindering international cooperation, those States Parties have agreed to do, such as provision of assistance in case of a treaty violation. How to fulfill those obligations is not always clear; they require clarification. Furthermore, the obligations as they were understood in the 1970s have evolved and perceptions of the challenges the BWC faces have also changed, resulting in different expectations. A final challenge concerns national capacity to fulfill those obligations, which may be another source of non-compliance. Problematic in the compliance debates is the absence of a formal verification process that would impartially investigate any concerns. Several components of a verification system already exist, but they remain underdeveloped. Dr Revill then proceeded to review various proposals since the meetings of the Verification Experts (VEREX) in the early 1990s and the subsequent Ad Hoc Group Negotiations, as well as more recent initiatives, such as the peer review. In his conclusion he advanced an incremental rather than all-or-nothing approach to increase confidence and enhance compliance. He encourage States Parties to experiment and test ideas and to consider ways of reducing the institutional deficit, which would definitely benefit compliance. Dr Larissa Nekrasova (Kazakh Scientific Centre of Quarantine and Zoonotic Diseases) began with presenting her institution and then proceeded how international and national regulations affect her work. As the institute was being set up, great care was given to implementation requirements of national and international regulations. A manual was produced. Anybody violating the rules may be dismissed and can face criminal charges. Once the regulations took effect, officials responsible for implementation and quality control were identified. An annual audit seeks out weaknesses. However, much qualitative improvement is still possible, and for that she looked at risk analysis and risk management. The current reporting mechanisms under the BWC are too passive and fail to take many important factors into account. Emphasis should be less on numbers (e.g., of staff), but more on qualifications and training and biorisk management standards. Reporting should include successes and failures, so that common progress can be made.
Article X was the subject of the sixth thematic session. **Mr Ladanov** introduced the Russian proposal on making mobile laboratories available as a humanitarian measure. He referred to the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the new Zika crisis and the need for rapid availability of diagnostic capacities. Two such units were deployed for 18 months to Guinea following a government request. He also argued that the mobile laboratories and their trained microbiologists could also be deployed as part of disease surveillance. The experts could then train local medical personnel. In case of a disease outbreak such units could be deployed immediately until WHO can mobilise its resources to address the emergency. Therefore, he believed that the UN (or the future institution supporting the BWC) should have such units available. He estimated the purchase cost per unit at 2 million Euros. **Ms Fanny Fert** (UNICRI – EU CBRN Centres of Excellence (CoE), Regional Coordinator for Central Asia) explained the global network of CoE partner countries and the many projects it covers. Of the 59 projects, 40 have a bio-component, and include biosecurity and -safety. These cover legal frameworks. Central Asia is slightly behind relative to other regions, because it is the newest region to participate in the initiatives. She then proceeded to detail how the CoE assist with the promotion and implementation of biorisk management standards and risk mitigation strategies. **Ms Kunsulu Zakarya** (Deputy Director General on scientific matters of the Republican Collection of Microorganisms, Kazakhstan) discussed the difficulties for Kazakhstan to join the World Data Centre for Microorganisms (WDCM). She noted that the requirements are so strict that they have proved unattainable. She welcomed the UNICRI - EU CBRN CoE programme’s focus on integration, stating that it would be beneficial for Kazakhstan. She also reiterated Kazakhstan’s regulatory framework and described the work done in various locations in the country, notably in Astana and Almaty, but also in the former BW site at Stepnogorsk, which was converted to peaceful purposes. She noted the importance for the country to increase the quality of biosecurity and -safety, and to combat Bioterrorism. An additional presentation (not listed in the programme) was made by **Dr Graeme Frith** (International Science & Technology Centre (ISTC), Astana, Kazakhstan). He introduced the ISTC, which had moved from Moscow in 2015 and described its funding and work programme, as well as the links with UNICRI - EU CBRN CoE programme.

The afternoon continued with the second plenary session moderated by **Dr Zanders** on participants’ perspectives on a successful outcome of the Eighth Review Conference. Several interventions returned to questions of biosecurity, and more particularly to the issue of organising globalized governance of
biosecurity. In this context the possible contribution of industry should not be ignored. Several major pharmaceutical companies already expressed their support for a strengthened BWC during the Ad Hoc Group negotiations and ways should be explored to get them engaged again in the future of the convention. This led to a discussion about the ownership of the treaty by States Parties and their responsibilities for its future. Some participants also revisited the problems and opportunities for strengthening Article VII. In terms of the forthcoming 8th Review Conference the idea of creating working groups to discuss in detail particular proposals was raised.

**Mr Feakes** offered some concluding thoughts before handing over the microphone to **Ambassador Molnár, Dr Kazakov** and **Mr Akan Rakhmetullin** (Director, Department of Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan) for their closing remarks.