

Mr. Chair,

Please allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the chair of this Meeting of States Parties (MSP). My delegation looks forward to supporting your efforts to achieve a successful outcome at the end of this week.

45 years after the conclusion of the negotiations, the BTWC remains one of the core pillars of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Convention has set a fundamental norm against using toxins and living organisms as mean of warfare. The BTWC is approaching near universality.

Yet, despite its successes, the BTWC cannot thrive unless States Parties engage actively to ensure full implementations of its provisions. For this reason, Norway regrets that the Eight Review Conference last year failed to agree on a program of work based on the President Proposal of 28 November 2016. It is therefore of greatest importance that we make full use of the mandate by the Eight Review Conference to achieve progress on substance and process before the 2021 Review Conference. We should aim for consensus on an international process.

Pending the adoption of a program of work, Norway would like to commend the supporting activities to the BTWC carried out by the European Union in 2017. The various workshops, the extended assistance programs and the peer review exercise, have truly given a lifeline for the BTWC.

The best way to sustain the Convention would be the adoption of a forward leaning intersessional program of work. Building on the work carried out at last year's Review Conference, Norway endorses the paper submitted by the US, the UK and the Russian Federation on *Elements of a Possible Intersessional Process*. We fully concur to the proposed format for the annual MSPs as well as the important role of the Implementation Support Unit. We appreciate the proposal to set up open-ended working groups tasked to explore, deliberate and make possible recommendations for consideration by the annual MSPs. Lastly, we concur with broad orientations for the respective OEWGs: Science and Technology, National Implementation, International Cooperation and Preparedness, Response and Assistance.

It is evident that there are great potential benefits, but also risks associated with developments in science and technology. We must enable the BTWC to follow this area.

Norway has for several years emphasized the need to further develop and refine the BTWC' Confidence Building Measures (CBM), this dimension is fully reflected in the proposed elements. Norway has also focused on safety and security standards in relation to biological laboratories.

Norway attaches great importance to article X of the BTWC. States Parties may need assistance and advice in strengthening national capacities in fulfilling their international commitments. Furthermore, support is required to enable countries to respond to any outbreak of disease, natural or intentional. For a number of years, Norway has emphasized that a well-functioning public health sector provides the best defense against any possible outbreak. In fulfilling article X, we must ensure that neither the ISU nor the BTWC are operational agencies. Yet, we should explore a close partnership with relevant national and international institutions, and not least further refine the database.

By adopting such an approach, the BTWC community will enable itself to develop practical measures for the further strengthening of our Convention. Norway would be ready to its part in order to contribute to this endeavor.