Strengthen the Global Ban on Biological Weapons
Statement of Pax Christi International to the Preparatory Committee Meeting to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

8-12 August 2016, Geneva

Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you during your Preparatory Committee Meeting. We wish to make some concrete proposals of direct relevance to your efforts in preparing for the upcoming Eighth Review Conference, 7-25 November 2016.

We encourage increased collaborative efforts aiming at universalisation of the Convention, as reported by the Implementation Support Unit in the background document on the “Status of Universalisation of the Convention”.

In addition, we strongly recommend increased attention to strengthening national implementation. Even in countries that have signed and ratified the Convention, more attention to effective oversight of compliance with the Convention is necessary. An example is the possible dual use of life sciences. Ongoing efforts at raising awareness among scientists of biosecurity risks and codes of conduct are laudable. Nevertheless, governments of the States Parties to the Convention are first and foremost responsible to protect citizens all over the world against misuse of life sciences for biological weapons.

Even if all the States in the world would be Party to the Convention, that would not be enough to ban biological weapons. We call upon the States Parties to agree on a new transparency mechanism to provide reassurance on the implementation of all Articles of the Convention. Numerous proposals have been made in the last five years. For example, France and the Benelux have suggested a peer review mechanism. Germany has proposed a Munich 'compliance visit' in 2016. Similar approaches include 'compliance assessment' (Canada-Switzerland-Czech Republic), 'implementation review' (Canada-US-Ghana-Chile-Mexico) and ‘providing reassurance on BWC implementation’ (Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ghana, Japan, Malaysia, Norway, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Thailand). This year, 2016, is the

time to agree and implement a new mechanism to provide reassurance on the implementation of all Article of the Convention.

Many proposals have been made to strengthen the monitoring of relevant developments in science and technology. This is becoming ever more urgent in the light of rapid progress in life sciences and recent scientific breakthroughs. We call upon the States Parties to agree on an efficient, effective and transparent system, which will provide relevant and meaningful information to enable States Parties to make appropriate and timely decisions each year. To facilitate participation of civil society in dialogue on biosecurity, this information should be publicly accessible.

Article X of the Convention calls for international cooperation on peaceful uses of life sciences. This presupposes joining forces with other relevant programmes and initiatives, in order to efficiently use the scarce resources. Synergy is clearly possible with UN Sustainable Development Goal\(^2\) 3, with sub goal 3.d. This reads: “Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.” In relation to this, we recommend exploring the relevance of the newly established UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism\(^3\) for fostering equal access to the benefits offered by life sciences, as well as to measures for controlling potential biosecurity threats.

Knowing that you have a busy schedule this week, we limit ourselves to these suggestions. Thank you for your attention. Pax Christi International wishes you all fruitful discussions and a successful Preparatory Committee Meeting.

Geneva, 8 August 2016.

\(^2\) [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs)
\(^3\) [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/TFM](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/TFM)