



**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**

AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION

Opening Statement by Ms Vanessa Wood, Counsellor Disarmament

4 December 2017

Mr Chair

I congratulate you on your assumption of the role of Chair for 2017, and offer you our full support.

It is clear from the diversity of papers submitted this year and in preceding years, that States Parties have thought deeply about the value they place on the BWC, and their desire to strengthen its implementation. We have a wealth of material to draw from. We look forward to a collaborative meeting, where we look beyond our regional groupings, and find ways to cooperate across the whole BWC membership. We warmly welcome and congratulate our regional partner Samoa as the 179th State Party to the BWC. Australia is also pleased to continue to support the BWC's sponsorship program.

We congratulate Morocco on its peer review exercise – the range of agencies relevant to implementing the BWC is instructive for BWC States Parties contemplating preparing their first Confidence Building Measures report.

Mr Chair

We welcome the collaborative work of BWC States Parties with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) over 2016-17 including in strengthening global

mechanisms and capacities for responding to deliberate use of biological agents. In 2016 Australia hosted with UNODA the first southern hemisphere UN Secretary-General's Mechanism training course to strengthen capacity particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, to support the UNSGM's operational capabilities. The course focused on investigating the alleged use of a biological weapon.

We are pleased there has been a resurgence of interest in the BWC at a national and regional level. Australia has participated in several workshops, which covered BWC matters under a broader UNSCR 1540 focus, particularly in our region.

Australia will continue to advocate for effective national implementation as a key to strengthening the BWC. National implementation provides reassurance that other states parties are fulfilling their respective obligations under the treaty. The Australia Group has a longstanding offer of assistance to States Parties in developing and implementing national export controls, in the BWC Article X (assistance and cooperation) database.

Consistent with our BWC Article X obligations, the Australian Government has allocated \$300 million over five years to contribute to the avoidance and containment of infectious disease threats that have the potential to cause social and economic harm on a national, regional or global scale. The Initiative will work across the full spectrum of prevention, detection, outbreak preparedness and response, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region. Investments will be managed by Australia's newly established Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security.

Mr Chair

Over the next 10 years, the world will face new proliferation challenges because of emerging technologies with WMD applications. Technological advances make developing bio weapons easier and cheaper. It is our duty as States Parties to make sure the BWC is up to the job - sufficiently dynamic and flexible to respond to new issues in a substantive way.

We urge States Parties to work cooperatively to reach consensus on a substantive and practical framework for activities for 2018-2021. One of the key elements of value to

all States Parties is a flexible and action-oriented Science and Technology mechanism. We commend Switzerland's Working Paper on this issue.

We would like to thank those who have put forward ideas to move us forward. The Russia, UK, US paper on elements of a possible intersessional process provides an important start. The excellent workshop hosted by Malaysia, and the United States last week gave a taste of the breadth of issues that could usefully be discussed in working groups.

We also need to recognise that an effective intersessional process needs to be funded. We note the ISU's advice that "challenges persist with respect to the financial situation of the BWC". Australia appreciates the ISU's hard work this year in organising and participating in so many BWC-associated activities.

Mr Chair

It was encouraging to see some women experts speaking at last week's workshop, and to have several female delegates here this week. We need to keep working to improve the diversity of the voices in this room, and the composition of our delegations. We look forward to listening to the views of all countries on strengthening and implementing the BWC. Flexibility, creativity, and compromise will be essential.

Thank you