



## **EU General Statement**

### **Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention**

**Geneva, 4-8 December 2017**

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, Montenegro\*, Serbia\* and Albania\*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

Let me start by congratulating you on your chairmanship and offer our full cooperation and support for your efforts to build consensus towards a substantive outcome of this important meeting. We also thank the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) for its valuable work.

We reaffirm our strong support for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and our continued dedication to its strengthening, further universalisation and full implementation. We consider the BTWC a key component of the international non-proliferation and disarmament framework and the cornerstone of efforts to prevent biological agents and toxins from ever being developed and used as weapons by anyone at any time, whether States or non-State actors.

The possibility of the use of biological weapons remains a very serious concern. We cannot rule out the diversion of a biological agent by a State or by non-State actors. Given the potential widespread adverse effects of the use of biological or toxin weapons, we must work together to enhance the level of preparedness to be able to better face this threat. Hence the crucial importance of the work within the BTWC.

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\* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The European Union hence engaged actively and constructively in the preparations of the Eighth Review Conference in 2016, organising three regional workshops and reaching out to many key stakeholders. We were all the more disappointed that the Review Conference did not lead to consensus on a new intersessional programme of work despite the significant efforts of the Hungarian Presidency and the vast majority of States Parties. The proposed intersessional programme would have benefited all States Parties in reviewing developments in the field of science and technology, enhancing national implementation, increasing international cooperation, and improving preparedness, response and assistance.

In this context, the European Union recalls that the Review Conference gave a mandate to this Meeting of States Parties to make progress on substance and process before the 2021 Review Conference, with a view to reaching consensus on an intersessional process. We stress the crucial importance of the MSP agreeing on a meaningful programme of work that would strengthen the BTWC and enhance its implementation and universalisation in a structured and effective way. We call on all parties to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to achieve this goal.

In our view, the previous discussions on an intersessional programme, as well as the wealth of working papers and proposals put forward for the Eighth Review Conference, represent a good starting point for the MSP. In this respect, the paper submitted by the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Russian Federation entitled "BTWC 2017 Meeting of States Parties: Elements of a Possible Intersessional Process" is a good basis for reaching consensus on a balanced draft Decision and the growing broad-based support for the paper is welcome. We commend the efforts all three partners made to build consensus and jointly develop this paper.

The European Union has promoted the following six topics for a new intersessional programme: national implementation and compliance; further work on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs); assistance and cooperation under Article VII of the Convention; developments in science and technology; review of the Consultative Committee procedure; and universalisation. These objectives, which we may elaborate in more detail during our discussions, were adopted by our Ministers in November 2015 as part of the EU's position for the Eighth Review Conference and circulated as a Working Paper on 12 April 2016 under reference BWC/CONF/VIII.WP.5.

Given the current absence of an intersessional programme, the European Union's assistance activities play an increasingly important role and provide a lifeline for the BTWC. We are grateful to the Implementation Support Unit for the continued professional implementation of the EU's fourth assistance programme laid down in EU Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP. An overall budget of 2.34 million EUR has been made available to this end.

The important financial commitments reflect the EU's strong political support for the BTWC. They bring direct benefits for the Convention and dozens of countries around the world. At

the same time, assistance provided through voluntary contributions, such as EU Council Decisions or other informal processes, cannot and should not replace activities to be carried out within the multilateral framework of the BTWC.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me highlight in particular the following four activities supported by the European Union during 2017:

- In order to promote universal adherence to the Convention, a workshop for the Pacific region was organised in Fiji in July leading to the accession of Samoa as the 179<sup>th</sup> State Party to the BTWC. We warmly welcome Samoa and seize this opportunity to call on all States not yet party to join the Convention without delay.
- In order to enhance interaction with non-governmental stakeholders on science and technology, a regional workshop was organised in Kiev in September to directly engage scientists and professionals on biosafety and biosecurity in countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. We welcome voluntary codes of conducts and other measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists.
- In order to enhance national capacities for BTWC implementation, extended assistance programmes were launched in ten selected States Parties: Cameroon, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Yemen. Structured Action Plans are now being developed, tailored for each beneficiary country on the basis of their needs and priorities, to facilitate capacity building assistance, notably drafting of legislation, biosafety/biosecurity training, dual use export control, preparation and submission of Confidence Building Measures, awareness-raising for scientists, and emergency response planning. The EU continues to support the concrete implementation of the BTWC also through other assistance programmes. We invite interested States to two EU-sponsored side events on Thursday, 7 December.
- Finally, we would like to congratulate Morocco for successfully conducting a peer review exercise that was organised with EU support in Rabat and in Casablanca in May. 16 international experts from 10 States Parties participated in the exercise which contributed to strengthening national implementation, improving confidence in compliance by increased transparency, and deepening international cooperation. We reiterate our support for the concept of non-intrusive initiatives that increase trust by fostering transparency and enhance cooperation among States Parties, such as peer reviews, voluntary visits and alike. We encourage all States Parties to consider conducting or participating in peer review initiatives and other voluntary transparency exercises, which are a valuable tool to further strengthen the BTWC. We remain ready to continue cooperation with States Parties in this regard.

While recognising that there is no consensus regarding verification at this stage, which remains a central element of a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, we will continue to promote options that contribute to an increase in confidence in

compliance with the Convention and to the effective implementation of the object and purpose of the BTWC. We call on all States Parties to increase their participation in, and the quality and comprehensiveness of annual CBMs and make use of the CBM guide, the national implementation guide and the upcoming electronic CBM facility, which have received EU funding.

Let me also take this opportunity to underline the continued relevance of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons. Further strengthening the operational capabilities of this mechanism will also contribute to strengthening Article VI and indirectly Article VII of the BTWC. As the custodian of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) plays a special role in this regard.

Mr Chairman,

The continued critical financial situation of the BTWC remains a matter of deep concern to the EU. The unpaid contributions and arrears are putting in danger the effective operation of the BTWC and our joint efforts to ensure a meaningful intersessional programme. We once again urge all States to comply with their financial obligations in full and on time.

I would like to assure you once again that the European Union and its Member States have a strong interest in a successful Meeting of States Parties and will spare no effort to this effect. We reiterate our firm support for the fulfilment of the MSP's mandate, including "reaching consensus on an intersessional process" and adopting decision on a substantive work programme during the period until the Ninth Review Conference. We must avoid another setback in order not to weaken the BTWC regime.

Thank you, Mr Chairman

*- Check against delivery -*