Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives:

The University of London appreciates the opportunity to contribute views to this Preparatory Committee through the NGO Statements. First of all we want to encourage you to prepare the way for a successful Eighth Review Conference. We encourage you to put this week to the fullest use, with determination to build on the many good ideas that are available and shape them ready for November.

We welcome your guidance to the PrepCom that before turning to an Article-by-Article discussion it should first consider cross-cutting issues like the structure of the next intersessional process and the Implementation Support Unit. Experience has shown that these are two areas in which a Review Conference can fail at a late stage. So careful preparation is vital. We hope the new PrepCom process this time will enable proposals in both these areas to go forward to the Review Conference fully costed, thoroughly examined and enjoying wide-ranging cross-regional support.

Restructuring the Intersessional Process

Regarding the next intersessional process, the aim should be to make this one more purposeful than the third ISP has been: more productive of common understandings and, especially, effective action. The purpose of the ISP for 2017-2020 should be to take the Convention forward, so that it is in better health at the end of the four years than it was at the beginning: more credible, more effective, and made relevant to the world of the 2020s. This will only happen with structural change. So we want to see a restructuring which produces a pattern of meetings fit for purpose. We believe that such a restructuring can be costed on the basis of BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/6 with States Parties making full use of four weeks in each year from 2017 to 2020.

The structure we recommend retains the Annual Meeting of States Parties but replaces the Meetings of Experts with new Working Groups.

Within each year, one week should be given over to reviewing advances in science and technology related to the Convention. A strong case has been made for this review to be conducted more systematically in the next ISP. The best structure suggested for enabling this more systematic review is an Open Ended Working Group and we hope delegations this week will be more explicit than before in expressing support for this proposal. It is vital to be inclusive of all States Parties; we think this principle is widely accepted but we also hope provision will be made for contributions from academies of science and other relevant sources so that the S&T review each year can benefit from a full range of expertise, from outside as well as inside governments.

A second week should be devoted to another Open Ended Working Group. This one would address providing reassurance on implementation of the Convention. We see the new Working Group as the forum in which States Parties would share their experiences in demonstrating their commitment to making the Convention work, whether by engaging in peer review, or compliance assessment, or implementation review, or compliance visits, or transparency measures of any kind. All these initiatives have common features: they are voluntary, they are innovative, and they are designed to provide reassurance. Through these initiatives States Parties may develop a common understanding as to how best to reassure one another, and the wider world, that they are indeed fully compliant with their BWC obligations. Up to now, the lack of such a common understanding has weakened the Convention. Hence our appreciation for those States Parties which have pioneered pilot exercises in reassurance and our recommendation for a Working Group focussed on the concept and practice of reassurance as a key element in strengthening the BWC.
We also recommend a third week for a Technical Working Group to revise the CBM forms as deemed necessary, to further develop the electronic platform, and to continue fine-tuning the CBM process.

The fourth week should be for the Annual Meeting of States Parties. This should become more than merely a forum for receiving reports and restating well-known positions. We hope this PrepCom will reconsider the role of the Annual Meeting, and encourage the Review Conference to let it take decisions on a limited range of matters, such as adjustments to the detail of the intersessional programme, and of the CBMs. It should also be authorised to make recommendations for action to the States Parties, year by year, and not just to the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. These decisions and recommendations would naturally be informed by what the working groups produce each year, but always within the framework laid down by the Eighth Review Conference. The consensus rule would still apply as much to the Annual Meeting as to the Review Conference, so it is difficult to understand how giving limited powers of decision-making to the Annual Meeting could disadvantage any State Party or detract from the authority of the Review Conference.

A further element in restructuring the intersessional process which we recommend is a Steering Committee. This would bring together what up to now have been the loosely distributed tasks of various office-holders, so that together they can watch over the health of the Convention and promote the constructive evolution of the ISP through to 2021, acting on behalf of all the States Parties and the wider BWC community. We envisage this Steering Committee to include the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Annual Meetings, the Chairs of Working Groups, and representatives of the Depositaries. Naturally we would see it working closely with the ISU. And, like the ISU, it would report to each Annual Meeting of States Parties.

**Strengthening the Implementation Support Unit**

Turning now to the ISU, we see a strong case for renewing its mandate and extending it where the restructuring of the intersessional process produces additional requirements. This has obvious implications for staffing. In particular, a Scientific Secretary is needed to give professional support to the more systematic review of S&T which we recommend should be conducted by an Open Ended Working Group. Staff support for the Open Ended Working Group on Providing Reassurance and the Technical Working Group on CBMs will also be vital to their success.

However, we must not forget that the existing staff is already over-stretched because the Seventh Review Conference added new tasks but, at the last minute, refused to pay for them. As a result, the ISU has had to draw attention in each of its annual reports since 2012 to the work it has not been able to do, for lack of resources. This PrepCom has before it the estimated costs for an ISU with two additional posts. To fund a staff of five would merely restore the position to where it ought to have been throughout the last ISP. Five is a very small staffing complement for such an important treaty. We encourage States Parties to treat five, rather than three, as the baseline from which to calculate the extra resources needed to give adequate staff support to the new structure for the next ISP. In this regard, as in others, we ask this PrepCom to give a strong lead to the Review Conference.

We wish you a successful week in laying the groundwork that will enable the Review Conference to steer the constructive evolution of the BWC over the next five years.

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