

**Statement by Ambassador Robert Wood
Special Representative for Biological Weapons Convention Issues
United States of America**

**Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention
Geneva, Monday, 4 December 2017**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The U.S. Delegation is pleased to see you presiding over our meeting, and welcomes your efforts to secure a positive outcome. I pledge the support of my delegation to this end.

The U.S. Delegation welcomes Samoa as the 179th State Party to the BWC. Our steady march toward universal membership continues to reinforce the norm against biological weapons.

I also want to thank the Implementation Support Unit staff for their hard work over the past year. The ISU is small, but plays a critical role.

Mr. Chairman,

The delegations here have a clear mission. The Eighth Review Conference was unable to reach agreement on a program of work – but it charged us with addressing issues of both substance and process, and with reaching consensus on a new program of work. Our task is to complete what last year's Review Conference could not.

For fifteen years, BWC intersessional work programs have contributed to global awareness of a wide range of important issues. They resulted in improvements to national implementation of the BWC and strengthened collaborations. We welcome the creation and growth of the assistance and coordination networks – bilateral and multilateral -- that have been part and parcel of these developments. In recent years, however, most of the progress has occurred outside the BWC: we sought to address a wider range of topics, but did not adjust our schedule and working methods to match this ambition. It is deeply unfortunate that it was not possible to address these shortcomings and continue intersessional discussions in 2017.

Mr. Chairman,

The good news is that the lack of progress at the Review Conference did not translate into lack of progress outside formal BWC meetings. This year there has been a great deal of activity by States Parties, civil society, and technical experts, including several international meetings on relevant issues. Last week, nearly fifty delegations attended a BWC workshop here in Geneva,

organized by Malaysia and the United States, to highlight a number of these efforts. The workshop featured 22 speakers from 10 States Parties, five international organizations, and five nongovernmental organizations. All regions of the globe were represented, and the discussion was rich as a result. We invite you to join us at today's lunch hour side-event, which will feature experts from last week's workshop.

The bad news, of course, is that efforts outside the BWC often involve only a subset of States Parties; and do not directly pave the way for deeper engagement in this forum. While such useful and supportive activities will undoubtedly continue, they should complement our work, not substitute for its absence. We hope that next year they will be conducted within the context of a reinvigorated ISP.

Mr. Chairman,

From adversity springs determination. Since the Review Conference, the United States, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom have reached out to other States Parties from all regions to identify possible elements for a constructive, substantive program of work that might find consensus, building on President Molnár's widely-supported proposal. Drawing on that outreach, we proposed elements of a possible intersessional process, including a list of topics to focus work. This proposal falls well below our national aspirations: it is a genuine effort to find a way past last year's impasse. As Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov said recently, "Notwithstanding the differences our three governments have in regard to how the enhanced implementation of the Convention may be best achieved, we are convinced that States Parties should unite to ensure action in support of the Convention."

The U.S. Delegation is encouraged by the support from many delegations for a meaningful program build around expert-level work on a balanced set of key issues. We believe there is broad support for working groups, tasked to prepare factual reports, including possible recommendations, for consideration at the annual Meeting of States Parties.

Mr. Chairman,

Funding of BWC work remains a serious problem, in terms of both overdue assessments and structural financial problems that have made it difficult to provide the Implementation Support Unit staff with something more reliable than very short-term contracts. We welcome the recent partial payment of substantial overdue assessments, but States Parties still owe a total of \$149,768, which equals 13.5% of this year's budget.

We cannot postpone actions needed to put the BWC on a more stable financial foundation. We need to consider ways to reduce expenses and to encourage those who remain in arrears to pay their assessments, as the member States to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) did just a week ago. Furthermore, we need to address the serious cash flow problem resulting from the United Nations' "cash up front" requirement. The U.S. Delegation looks forward to working with others to overcome these problems without further delay.

Mr. Chairman,

Our meeting this week is our only chance to find a way to make substantive progress until the next Review Conference. We are fortunate to have this second chance; we should make good use of it. If we do not, we abdicate our responsibilities. We must continue to combat the threat of biological weapons, in spite of whatever differences may exist between us. If we simply settle for making speeches at annual meetings, we are not only failing to take up the difficult but essential work confronting us: we are walking away from the opportunity to combat this threat together.

Mr. Chairman,

We look forward to continuing to work with you and all States Parties for the success of this Meeting of States Parties. You can count on us.