Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP in support of the BTWC

Regional Workshop for the Pacific Region,

Nadi, Fiji, 27 – 28 July 2017

EU Opening Remarks

(Greetings)

Let me start by congratulating all participants in the Regional Workshop for the Pacific Region and wish you fruitful discussions in view of enhancing universal adherence to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the host country Fiji and the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) for your support and the excellent organisation of this important regional event.

The European Union (EU), building upon the positive outcome of its previous assistance programmes is providing further substantial financial support for a series of projects to underpin the implementation and universalisation of the BTWC.

As detailed presentation of the 2016 EU Council Decision in support of the BTWC – which is already the fourth of the kind, will follow later today, let me focus on the main topic of this workshop – the universalisation of the BTWC, and related EU priorities and activities.

But before doing so, I would like to shortly outline the broader perspective of where the European Union stands in the implementation and the development of its policy and positions on non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

As you may know, the strong and consistent support of the European Union for multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament norms and institutions is enshrined in its 2003 WMD non-proliferation Strategy and has been reaffirmed in the EU Global Strategy, published in June 2016.

Thus, the Global Strategy specifically commits the European Union to continue strongly supporting the expanding membership and universalisation, full implementation and enforcement of multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control treaties and regimes.
This includes the BTWC which is seen as the cornerstone of the efforts of the international community to prevent biological agents and toxins from ever being developed and used as weapons.

Here, we would like to be clear that our commitment to the strengthening of the BTWC remains firm despite the disappointing outcome of the 2016 Review Conference and the lack of agreement on, inter alia, concrete measures promoting universal membership to the BTWC.

In the absence of dedicated intersessional programme we continue our political and financial support to the BTWC through the comprehensive implementation of Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP which provides 2.34 million EUR to this end.

At the same time, we are of the opinion that assistance provided through voluntary contributions, including EU Council Decisions should not be seen as a substitution to activities to be carried out within the BTWC proper framework.

This is why we are engaged in the ongoing informal discussions in Geneva in view of the preparation of the Meeting of States Parties (MSP) in December 2017. In accordance with the EU common position and priorities, we are supporting the fulfilment by the MSP of its mandate as laid down in the Final Document of the Eighth Review Conference. Let me recall that the MSP has been tasked by the Review Conference 'to seek to make progress on issues of substance and process for the period before the next Review Conference, with a view to reaching consensus on an intersessional process'.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will now turn to the issue of strengthening the BTWC through achieving the goal of universal adherence which remains EU key priority.

In this regard, the European Union is supporting tailor made universalisation activities, at national, regional and global level, conducted at the request of States not party to the Convention, starting with those who are at an advanced stage of membership consideration.
Until now, the EU had supported, through the provision of dedicated funding, 25 workshops – of which 16 were regional – in order to promote the BTWC and, in particular, its universalisation and effective implementation.

Sixteen countries both party and not yet party to the Convention, had received assistance through previous EU Decisions, while ten more have been selected for assistance under the current Council Decision. Dedicated funding is used to increase awareness of the BTWC among national stakeholders, including through the drafting of national legislation to join and/or implement the Convention.

The EU also enabled the attendance and participation of a number of developing countries in BTWC meetings and workshops through the provision of a sponsorship programme.

Thus, since the adoption in 2006 of the first EU BTWC-related Decision (or, rather Joint Action, as this type of EU legal acts used to be called at that time), 23 States have joined the Convention, the overall number of the States Parties reaching 178.

Moreover, on the eve of the Eighth Review Conference in 2016, the European External Action Service carried out EU demarche on universal adherence to the BTWC in fifteen signatory States and States not party to the Convention.

In this context, the EU Delegation for the Pacific reached out to the five States not party to the Convention in the region. It is my real pleasure to warmly congratulate the representatives of Kiribati, Micronesia, Niue, Samoa, and Tuvalu who are among us today.

We believe that this EU initiative provided an excellent occasion to discuss possible national steps towards signature/ratification of the Convention as well as needs for possible international assistance in this regard.

We are therefore pleased that since our contacts in October last year, tangible progress on the path towards accession to the BTWC was made in some of the Pacific States. Building upon our constructive cooperation thus far we would like to encourage the Pacific States not yet party to the BTWC to consider undertaking the necessary political and legislative measures with a view to signing/ratifying the Convention.
You can rely on strong and consistent EU support in this endeavour.

I wish you once again productive discussions during the workshop.

Thank you for your attention!