UK STATEMENT FOR THE EIGHTH BTWC REVIEW CONFERENCE SECOND PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETING 8-12 AUGUST 2016

In our statement at the April session we outlined a proposal for a revised and improved work programme for the period 2017-2020. We undertook to follow-up our statement with a national Working Paper setting out specific language for inclusion in the Decision and Recommendations section of the Final Document of the Review Conference – this was presented on the ISU website on 19 July in Working Paper 15. Our paper attempts to reflect the views and comments that we heard from States Parties in April and in the intervening months as well as to accommodate the known positions of others to the extent possible.

The fundamental objective of such a new programme is to improve our collective capacity for in-depth substantive and technical discussion, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and implementation of the Convention.

A legally binding and multilaterally negotiated agreement is not practical politics now or for the foreseeable future. Presenting that as the only option is a recipe for inaction.

Nor would the interests of the Convention be best served by a mere carbon copy of what we did here between 2012 and 2015: that should not be seen as an acceptable outcome.

Our objective instead must be on the design of a workable and productive process that is much more than a mere talking shop.

One of the most serious shortcomings of the previous model was the inability to take decisions on effective action - a self-imposed limitation arising from the last Review Conference. There is no absolute rule that dictates that only Review Conferences can ever take substantive decisions – the history of the Convention clearly shows otherwise from the establishment of the CBM modalities in 1987, the Special Conference in 1994 that created the Ad Hoc Group, and the Consultative Meeting that convened in 1997. If the States Parties agree to do something, then anything is possible.

A new programme should have discrete and well defined decision making powers delegated to the Annual Meeting of States Parties by the Review Conference to enable effective actions to be taken, and common understandings established that can help shape and inform national and international actions.

Within the Intersessional Process, only the Annual Meeting of States Parties will take substantive decisions on actions and common understandings that may emerge from
the other bodies that we propose, though it is important that these too have the authority to set their agenda and determine the outcomes of their work.

Focussed work on science and technology really needs to come first in a logical sequence of annual meetings. Our proposal for a Group of Government Experts on Science and Technology speaks to this point and is our first element in a new Intersessional process. The products of such meetings will inform and may well shape the discussions on Article VII and X issues as well as wider compliance considerations under Article I, or on national implementation aspects arising under Articles III and IV.

Activities relevant to Article X that prevent, detect and combat infectious disease outbreaks regardless of their origin create linkages to Article VII. They are relevant to its operationalisation. Given this synergy, it is essential that future consideration of these issues in a new work programme takes place in the same space – the rationale for this is explained in our second Working Paper for this meeting: WP 14 entitled “Articles VII and X: the importance of synergy”. A separate self-contained working group on cooperation issues is thus the second element in our overall scheme of intersessional meetings.

The third element is an annual meeting of States Parties, which will convene for up to two weeks each year in the autumn to review and decide as required any recommendations or conclusions arising from Group of Government Experts on Science and Technology and the Working Group on Cooperation and Assistance. I stress this point again and hope that it provides reassurance to those concerned that expert groups might in some way supplant the role of states’ political representatives.

The Meeting of States Parties will also deal with other issues on an as required basis; and these would include inter alia reports and actions on measures taken by the States Parties singly or collectively to ensure, promote and strengthen effective national implementation under Articles III and IV; measures to address the threat from non-state actors; and measures to provide effective frameworks for effective oversight, guidance and training in the life sciences.

Time on each topic will be allocated on an as required basis. We must break out of the artificial straightjacket that requires an absolute equality of treatment of every issue or Article regardless of the time needed to address specific issues comprehensively and at the right time.

The elements of a Decision for the Eighth Review Conference are proposed in our Working Paper 15. A new programme must be underpinned by an appropriately resourced Implementation Support Unit – ideally two further staff members to enable dedicated support to the S&T and cooperation meetings.
A key feature of our proposal that we would like to draw attention to is that the annual Meeting of States Parties would report in two parts: the first will be a summary of the discussions produced in a personal capacity by the chair; the second will contain any recommendations or actions agreed by the States Parties, much in the same way that OPCW Executive Council or Conference of States Parties Decisions are negotiated and adopted. The 2017-2020 intersessional programme may be revised or updated by the annual meeting of States Parties in light of experience, but only where there is consensus to do so.

We are happy to take questions and further explain how any aspect of our proposal would function. We would welcome now in particular any comments or questions on the overall structure we have set out.

Thank you.