

**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, 14 December 2015**

Mr. Chairman, fellow delegates, and colleagues:

Every December, we discuss the threat of biological weapons and ways to address it. Every December, we recall the task entrusted to us: to develop common understandings and promote effective action under the Biological Weapons Convention. And every December, we adopt a report that consists mostly of recycled material and broad generalities. Have we advanced understanding of the threats and how to address them? Have our reports led to effective action? Certainly not enough.

We can do better. We need to do better. We do not have to revert to old habits.

Mr. Chairman,

Your nonpaper is a useful starting point for our work. Under your leadership, with the support of all delegations and the help of the Implementation Support Unit, we can reach a number of specific, clear understandings at this meeting. That would be an important achievement. It would help the international community to address the threat of biological weapons, and demonstrate our common resolve. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that my delegation will make every effort to support you in pursuit of this goal.

**International Cooperation and Assistance**

International cooperation is an important element of the BWC. We know there are disagreements about how to advance the goals of Article X of the Convention; but we should not allow those disagreements to prevent us from agreeing where we can and identifying specific steps we can take.

We have agreed on the importance of States Parties submitting reports on their experiences in implementing Article X. But very few States Parties have submitted such reports. We should call on all States Parties to submit reports before the 8<sup>th</sup> Review Conference. Further, we could invite those States Parties who have undergone Global Health Security Agenda or International Health Regulations core capacity assessments to consider using those assessments to identify needs for international cooperation, either in their Article X reports or in submissions to the Assistance and Cooperation Database.

We should also improve the database. We should call on the ISU to organize information about assistance and capacity-building programs thematically, and include links to other sources of technical information, assistance, and advice, not only from States Parties but from institutions like Interpol and WHO. The Article X undertakings apply to States Parties, but adding links to such information would make the database and website more useful – and if it is more useful, it will be used more.

### **Developments in Science and Technology**

Mr. Chairman, we have had constructive discussions about advances in science and technology. Here, too, there is room for specific, useful language. A list of developments with “potential for uses contrary to the convention” and another of developments with “potential benefits,” in our view, gloss over the fact that nearly all of these technologies have the potential to be used in both harmful and beneficial ways. We should recognize this, seek to articulate those risks and benefits, and indicate whether there are steps States Parties should take to mitigate the risks while preserving the benefits. I would hope that we could also further develop our understandings on dual-use and gain-of-function research.

### **Strengthening National Implementation**

We were given a mandate to strengthen national implementation. It is essential that our report recognize that better information about what countries are doing to implement the Convention is a critical requirement and must be addressed. Without such information, how can we understand what needs to be strengthened, or how best to go about it?

We should also further develop our shared understanding of what measures will help to achieve the goal of effective national implementation. As long ago as the

6<sup>th</sup> Review Conference, States Parties agreed on the importance of effective national export controls. Last year, we discussed specific elements widely recognized as key to such systems. This year, 37 States Parties proposed that we recognize the value of these elements in our report. This would be a valuable contribution – a common understanding that would, indeed, promote effective action. For this meeting, India and the United States have jointly submitted a working paper outlining further steps that could be taken in this area by the 8<sup>th</sup> RevCon. This working paper is an important cross-regional initiative that will be a significant contribution to our future work, and we welcome the support of other States Parties in this effort.

### **Strengthening Implementation of Article VII**

Mr. Chairman,

The international public health and emergency response architecture is in the midst of significant change right now. It is critical that the steps we take to strengthen Article VII are integrated into the new architecture that emerges. But that does not mean that no action in the BWC is possible. We should more explicitly recognize the inter-relationship between Article X and Article VII: efforts to assist States Parties in building their public health and response capabilities are not “assistance” in the sense of Article VII – but in the event of biological weapons use, may be even more valuable than response efforts after the fact.

And we should recognize and deal with a practical challenge: how is Article VII actually activated? Here, the proposals made by South Africa in working paper BWC/MSP/2015/MXP/WP.10 provide an excellent basis for further work, and could be provisionally applied now, without need for further delay.

### **Looking Toward the Review Conference**

We have another task this week: to take decisions on arrangements for next year’s Review Conference. My delegation strongly supports the proposal that we should prepare for our three-week RevCon with two separate, week-long preparatory meetings that will focus on substance as well as procedure. Such preparatory work is critical if we are to arrive at a strong, substantive outcome at the RevCon. It will ensure that our work is transparent, inclusive, and thoughtful. And, according to the estimates, it is affordable. The majority of States Parties will be asked to pay less than 100 dollars more than they were assessed for the 2011 Review Conference.

A good preparatory process and a strong outcome are essential, because the threat is real. Technological advances and the diffusion of knowledge, for all their positive effects, also place biological weapon capabilities within reach of more nations and terrorist groups than ever before. The world is currently witnessing renewed use of chemical weapons; there is no reason to think those who use these weapons will draw a moral line at the use of biological weapons. We must take stronger international action to confront this threat.

Some have called for a new round of negotiations on a supplementary treaty to the BWC. But we've been down that road. There continue to be deep divisions among delegations on critical issues. This is the path to deadlock and delay—it is a road that goes nowhere.

We see a better option: BWC States Parties already have the necessary authority to take practical steps that command wide support; we should marshal the political will to make use of that authority and take such steps. Instead of attempting to negotiate a new treaty, we should make better use of the powers we have under the treaty we've got.

Mr. Chairman, the Review Conference should take action to address the key challenges we confront. And to ensure that we can carry these agreements forward, and build on them in the future, the Conference should also take steps to strengthen our ability to take collective action between RevCons.

My delegation is pleased to present a working paper on this topic, entitled "Strengthening the Ability to Take Action: A Realistic Agenda for the 8th Review Conference," which sets out our ideas on reinforcing our working processes and structures, including the authority of annual meetings such as this one.

We look forward to discussing our ideas with other delegations. It is time to start the conversation about what comes next.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.