



CENTER FOR ARMS CONTROL AND NON-PROLIFERATION

SCIENTISTS WORKING GROUP ON BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS

322 4th Street, NE Washington, DC 20002

**Statement of the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation
and the Scientists Working Group on Biological and Chemical Weapons
to the 2008 Meeting of Experts of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
19 August 2008**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation and its Scientists Working Group on Biological and Chemical Weapons appreciate this opportunity to address this Meeting of Experts of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

Our remarks today address the second topic of discussion at this year's meeting, "oversight, education, awareness raising, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention."

Oversight can serve many functions, from ensuring that individuals engaged in life sciences activities adhere to national laws and guidelines and international norms, to minimizing the potential for dual-use research to contribute to the use of biology for hostile purposes, to providing increased awareness of and insight into relevant scientific and technological advances.

Oversight is also critical for ensuring that national biodefense research and development programs, whether conducted by military or civilian agencies, remain compliant with the BTWC. Recent years have seen significant growth in the biodefense efforts of many states. These include activities aimed at gaining or maintaining cutting-edge bioweapons-relevant knowledge and capabilities.

In general, such activities appear to reflect attempts to avoid "technological surprise" and to hedge against the possibility that a future state or non-state adversary may exploit biotechnology in unanticipated ways that could erode military strength or otherwise threaten national security. There is a danger that these activities could give rise to a "biodefense arms race," either within or between states, which would threaten the BTWC's objective of excluding completely the possibility of biological agents and toxins being used as weapons.

States Parties can take several steps, individually and collectively, to avert this danger. First, pursuant to their obligations under Article IV, States Parties should develop national compliance review mechanisms to ensure that their biodefense activities remain compliant with the Convention. Recently, we undertook an examination of the compliance oversight mechanisms used by several States Parties. We found that a variety of approaches are being taken. For example, some States Parties undertake an annual review of

their entire biodefense program and its activities, while others conduct pre-project review of every research activity. Some States Parties are developing codes of conduct for their biodefense researchers, and some are educating their researchers about the BTWC and national laws prohibiting the development of biological weapons. Often, the approach taken reflects the size and scope of a nation's biodefense program and the nature of its activities. In general, movement towards the adoption of more formal compliance review procedures appears to be a trend. Many compliance review processes have been developed only since the Fifth Review Conference, and many remain works in progress.

We are interested in learning more from States Parties about their compliance review mechanisms. More importantly, we believe that States Parties should share information about their compliance review processes with each other. While each State Party will adopt a compliance review process that best fits its national circumstances, all of these processes should share common, harmonized principles, standards, and criteria based on common understandings of the meaning and limits of Article I. Sharing information about national compliance review mechanisms, and collective discussion of such information, will help States Parties achieve these collective understandings.

To facilitate this process, States Parties should consider establishing a Confidence Building Measure (CBM) for providing information on national oversight of biodefense programs, including meaningful information on the inputs and outputs of these processes. Once established, a portion of each annual Meeting of States Parties should be devoted to collective review of national oversight processes and the information provided under the CBM in the preceding year. Such measures to enhance transparency remain the central technique available to States Parties for balancing their right to conduct biodefense research with their obligation to demonstrate that such research does not constitute development of biological weapons. In 2006, States Parties agreed to devote "comprehensive attention" to the CBM process at the Seventh Review Conference. We urge member States to start laying the groundwork now for significant advances on improving the CBM process in 2011.

Additionally, States Parties should make greater efforts to engage in cooperative biodefense research and development. While cooperative activities are most likely to take place among close allies, the establishment of broader research and development networks would further protect against the emergence of a "biodefense arms race" and would provide greater confidence in BTWC compliance.

Finally, States Parties should increase the attention they give to collective assessment of scientific and technological advances. At present, such assessment tends to be limited to discussions held once every five years at BTWC Review Conferences. This five-year cycle does not provide adequate time or opportunity for collective discussion of these advances, or of the ways in which States Parties are responding to them. Collective annual discussions of new developments in science and technology, and of appropriate responses to such developments, are likely to further decrease the risk of technological surprises from either states or non-state actors.

Thank you for your attention.