

**INES statement to the Meeting of Experts to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Geneva, July 2012**

Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a privilege and honour to be invited to make a statement to the Meeting of Experts to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), which I am doing on behalf of the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES).

Mr. Chairman,

INES welcomes the decision of the States Parties at the Seventh Review Conference of the BWC<sup>1</sup> to adopt an inter-sessional process that is more structured and geared towards making concrete progress in strengthening the BWC. As a network of engineers and scientists, we particularly welcome the inclusion of the *Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention* as a Standing Agenda item within this process. The rapidity of the developments in the life sciences, as well as the immensity and complexity of the knowledge gained about the mechanisms of life's vital processes make reaping the benefits while minimizing the potential risks created by this work a particularly challenging task.

The topical science and technology (S&T) subject to be reviewed under this Standing Agenda item this year is *advances in enabling technologies, including high-throughput systems for sequencing, synthesizing and analyzing DNA; bioinformatics and computational tools; and systems biology*.

Mr. Chairman,

In your letter to the States Parties dated June 21, 2012<sup>2</sup>, you propose that this topical subject be reviewed in relation to all seven sub-items listed in the *Final Document* of the Seventh Review Conference under *Part III. Decisions and Recommendations*<sup>3</sup>. INES would like to address several of these sub-items that are of particular concern to us.

In the review of the enabling technologies in relation to sub-item (a) *new science and technology developments that have potential for uses contrary to the provisions of the Convention*, the Meeting of Experts should determine whether the new developments in S&T are covered by the Convention under the scope of the prohibitions in Article I by making a thorough assessment of the potential risks relevant to the Convention that these advances create and advise the Meeting of States Parties of the outcome.

It follows that in relation to sub-item (c) *possible measures for strengthening national biological risk management, as appropriate, in research and development involving new science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention*, the Meeting of Experts should advise the Meeting of States Parties as to what measures might be implemented nationally in order to minimize these risks. This would tie in directly to and have relevance for the Standing Agenda item *Strengthening national implementation*.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, The Seventh Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, Geneva, 5 - 22 December 2011, *Final Document*, BWC/CONF.VII/7, 13 January 2012. Available at <http://unog.ch/bwc> and at <http://www.opbw.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Chairman Boujemâa Delmi To the Permanent Representatives in Geneva of the States Parties and Signatories to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Geneva, July 21, 2012. Available at [http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/16C37624830EDA5C12572BC0044DFC1?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/16C37624830EDA5C12572BC0044DFC1?OpenDocument)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 2012, op.cit., *Final Document, Part III. Decisions and Recommendations*, paragraph 22.

Mr. Chairman,

As is well known, the States Parties to the BWC have an obligation under Article IV not only to *prohibit* but also to *prevent* the use of biological agents for non-peaceful purposes. INES believes that much can be accomplished in the way of prevention by ensuring that all those working in the life sciences are aware of dual-use risks and their obligations to prevent misuse of their work under the Convention.

The most effective way to accomplish this would be through the promulgation of *(d) voluntary codes of conduct and other measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists, academia and industry* and most importantly, the implementation of programmes of *(e) education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology*. INES feels very strongly that the implementation of education and awareness-raising programmes would be one of the best ways to manage risks. However, we also feel strongly about the need for some additional mechanism to ensure that reflection about possible dual-use aspects of the work will indeed be made, that the scientist will put what has been learned through education into practice. This could be, for example, the requirement for a dual-use risk assessment of the work to be performed **prior** to it being carried out.

INES considers the review of the enabling technologies in relation to the sub-item *(b) new science and technology developments that have potential benefits for the Convention, including those of special relevance to disease surveillance, diagnosis and mitigation* to be particularly important. The Meeting of Experts should note the ways in which the enabling technologies can greatly aid in the surveillance, detection, diagnosis and mitigation of infectious diseases. These benefits can thus contribute to capacity building and implementation of the obligations in Article X, and tie in directly to the Standing Agenda item *Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X*.

Mr. Chairman,

Prior to and during the Seventh Review Conference of the BWC, several States Parties representing a wide global distribution submitted working papers calling for the establishment of Working Groups to carry out the review of S&T developments within a new inter-sessional process. INES is disappointed that this was not agreed. One of the most difficult tasks ahead for the States Parties at this Meeting of Experts will be to adequately cover all sub-items in the review in the limited time allotted. Your proposal about structuring this work during the week in order to accomplish the review is indeed helpful. In addition, the background papers submitted by the ISU on the new developments in enabling technologies and the review of the H5N1 avian flu virus work contain concise information needed for determining the relevance of advances for the Convention and should thus help speed up the process. Nevertheless, a revision of how the inter-sessional process is to proceed in order to provide more time for the S & T review may be necessary and would be of benefit for the subsequent years.

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