

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings March 2015 Chairman's Speaking Notes

Group of NAM and Other States: 9:00, Monday 16 March, Room V

Eastern European Group: 10:00, Monday 16 March, Room V

Western Group: 11:00, Monday 16 March, Room V

- Thank you for convening this meeting and for your support for my nomination as Chairman.
- I am privileged to enjoy working with two highly experienced Vice-chairs, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast of the Netherlands and Ambassador György Molnár, Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Hungary. I thank Ambassador van der Kwast for his presence here today. Ambassador Molnár was not able to come to Geneva, but I am happy that Mr. David Pusztai is able to represent him.
- In my letter of 11 February, which was sent to all Missions, to all designated National Contact Points and which is also posted on the BWC website, I outlined my plans for our 2015 meetings and invited your input and collaboration in preparing them. I hope you may be able to share some of your insights today.

I. Approach to our work in 2015

- As I noted in my letter, we are now entering the last year of our 2012–2015 intersessional programme and I intend to maintain the tried and tested working practices of my predecessors. I want to work with you to build on the solid foundation we have already created together, to create a strong platform for the Eighth Review Conference in 2016.
- I am also hopeful that in 2015 we will identify additional common understandings across all three Standing Agenda Items and the biennial topic. I believe we should seize every opportunity on offer.
- I believe we should continue to give greater focus to the “effective action” part of our mandate. The reports of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Meetings of States Parties contain a broad range of common understandings, some quite detailed. As we move ever closer to the Eighth Review Conference, we should continue to turn our attention towards options for promoting effective action, derived from those common understandings.
- As mentioned in my letter, on 26 March we will mark the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC. This is a significant milestone in the life of the Convention and one which I hope we can use to raise its profile and promote its universalization.

II. How to continue building on the work of 2012, 2013 and 2014

On universalization

- You may have seen on the BWC website that Mauritania acceded to the BWC on 28 January 2015. This is excellent news, which brings our membership to 172.

- Furthermore, I have been informed that Andorra has deposited its instrument of accession at the US consulate in Barcelona on 27 February 2015. We are currently awaiting further confirmation from the US State Department on this.
- I will continue the efforts to encourage new States to join our Convention. For example, I have written to a selection of Signatories and States not party to the Convention to request bilateral meetings with them to discuss the issue of their ratification or accession.
- I encourage you to use your own bilateral, regional and multilateral relationships to further this goal as well. Just as importantly, I would particularly value information on, and feedback received from, your efforts. This will assist me in undertaking the coordination role with which you have charged me.

On bringing in more voices

- I also believe it is important to continue the effort begun in previous years to "bring in more voices" to our work, to ensure that our work programme benefits from a broader range of expertise and perspectives and that a larger proportion of States Parties can benefit directly from participation in our work programme.
- Where they have insights or experience of particular relevance to our efforts, we must continue to bring in the necessary expertise from as many States Parties as possible, from international organizations, and from other bodies.
- Having considered the relevant common understandings we have identified in the past, it is clear that there is a desire from States Parties to hear, more clearly, the voices of industry and the private sector. I would appreciate any ideas, suggestions, or additional opportunities that you might bring to my attention.
- In my letter, I have already asked you to start thinking about the composition of your delegations, and to think about possibilities for making use of the sponsorship programme – whether it will be as a donor or as a recipient.
- On the sponsorship programme, the ISU has informed me that so far this year Australia and the Netherlands have made contributions to the programme. I thank these two States Parties for their contributions in support of the programme. May I encourage others in a position to do so to also contribute to the programme. Those who wish to do so should contact the ISU to discuss the practical arrangements. In order for the sponsorship programme to most effectively achieve its objective of supporting participation in BWC meetings, interested States Parties are encouraged to make contact as soon as possible with the ISU.
- Finally on bringing in more voices, I would also like to encourage you to make known to me any expertise, wherever it may be found, that you feel it may be opportune to have present at the Meeting of Experts.

On active engagement

- In the past two years we made progress in expanding the range of States contributing to our work. In their closing remarks at the Meetings of States Parties in 2013 and 2014, Ms. Körömi and Ambassador Schmid highlighted a number of States that had made contributions for the first time. I will be working to ensure that we will be able to report in a similar manner at the end of this year.

- For those States Parties that already engage actively, I encourage you to look for potential relevant collaboration with a State that has not been as vocal. These could provide excellent opportunities to consider joint presentations at the Meeting of Experts.
- For those States Parties that have yet to engage actively, I would encourage you to seek out your colleagues here in Geneva. I would be happy to discuss with you possibilities for contributions and how they might link to the programme as outlined by the Seventh Review Conference. If it can help in any way, also please do not hesitate to contact the ISU.

On identifying additional common understandings

- The common understandings are one of the most visible outcomes of our work. I believe that both in their own right and as tools to prepare for the next Review Conference, common understandings are very valuable.
- As we now consider the same Standing Agenda Items every year, we already have a strong foundation upon which to build. I believe that there remain areas within those same topics that we can further explore to find agreements.
- We must rededicate ourselves to this task. I am sure there is more that we can do and that there are areas of agreement we have yet to identify. By making use of the approaches, tools and practices that have proven so successful in the past, I hope that 2015 will see us find new areas of common understanding.

III. Promoting effective action

- We are now almost through this intersessional work programme. Whilst as I just highlighted, there is still much work to be done in discussion and promotion of common understandings, we must further consider how this translates into effective action in, and between, our countries. In line with the mandate for our work provided by the Seventh Review Conference, we should identify any aspects ripe for the promotion of effective action.
- We have a broad range of common understandings already identified by consensus. We have a constructive and collegial atmosphere, and we have our record of success. Like Ambassador Schmid, I would like to link these to effective action. I therefore encourage you in particular to think about ways in which we can turn the common understandings achieved over the previous years into effective action. I, the Vice-Chairs and the ISU stand ready to support you in this important task.

IV. Strengthening Article VII

- Our mandate, as decided by the Seventh Review Conference is: *“How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.”*
- Last year, we considered what mechanisms are in use, and what relevant capacity is present in other regimes and fora, such as by OCHA, OPCW and the WHO. To this end, I will ask the ISU to contact the relevant organizations and, if relevant, prepare an update of the background information provided to the Meeting of Experts in 2014.

These papers should be read in conjunction with background information provided by past Meetings of Experts.

- In the past, we have focused heavily on what capacity exists elsewhere and how the Convention might contribute to the efforts of others. Last year, we started to look into how this fits into our obligations under Article VII and how we might take action under this Convention. In 2015 we should further consider this discussion with a focus on the consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.
- Should a biological weapon be used against one of us tomorrow, it is important that we know what action should be taken under the Convention, by whom and in what way, so as to ensure the timely provision of any necessary assistance.
- I am keen to hear from you, what expertise we may need to bring in this year to help us further consider this topic.

V. The Meeting of Experts

- The Meeting of Experts will take place from 10 to 14 August. Our meetings seem to be most effective when all delegations know what to expect, when, and how all the various parts fit together. I think our attempts to provide a clear structure for the Meeting of Experts in 2012, 2013 and 2014 were effective. I do not intend to deviate from the past procedures and practices that, by now, should be familiar to you.
- I would like to reassure you from the outset that I intend to keep to the mandate given to us from the last Review Conference and to ensure that the overall allocation of time across each of our agenda items will be the same as it was last year. The balance between agenda items shall be maintained.
- If we are to be able to put together as efficient a plan as possible, it would be important for the ISU and me to know, as soon as possible, what contributions you are planning to make. In order to have the most effective and constructive discussions at the Meeting of Experts, I encourage States Parties to submit working papers and other documents as early as possible in order for them to be properly considered in advance of the Meeting.
- In return, I will be sharing with you on a regular and ongoing basis how I am hoping to fit these individual contributions together, what international organizations may be present and, on what they are thinking of contributing, as well as possibilities for guests of the meeting and side events. I intend to keep an informal, rolling schedule available to all on the webpage of the Meeting of Experts (www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting).
- I am keen to continue to group presentations according to their theme and content. This will allow us to consider like-with-like and provide an optimum arrangement for interaction and discussion. I am also particularly keen to be able to schedule joint presentations, where States Parties have worked together. I would also like to call on States Parties to work together across regional groupings so that we have deeper and honest understanding of issues.
- Once again, I would like to ensure that our side event programme complements, and contributes effectively, to our official work. For that reason, as previous Chairs did, I am intending to reserve the lunchtime slots of the Meeting of Experts, until we have an overview on all the possible uses for them. In consultation with the Vice-Chairs, we

will then contact those proposing events which best fit our schedule and invite them to make use of these slots.

- I have also begun to think about what background papers might be useful for our work. I would appreciate any views or insights you may have as to what additional areas we may need to cover.

VI. ISU staffing

- Let me now turn to a different issue. As you are aware, the ISU is currently recruiting its P4 and P3 staff. I understand that the selection process for the P4 post should be completed at the end of April with the new recruit starting thereafter. The selection process for the P3 post should be completed by early May with the new recruit also starting soon thereafter. We should by June have a fully staffed ISU.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, allow me to sum up the key points of my letter, where I invited you to share your views on the five following sets of information:
 - Ideas for approaches and facets of our topics that might be ripe for focusing on effective action;
 - Ideas and expertise necessary for further considering our biennial item on strengthening the implementation of Article VII;
 - Suggestions for international organizations or guests of the meeting for the Meeting of Experts;
 - Details of, and feedback received, from universalization activities; and
 - Details of any workshops, seminars or other events which might support our work this year – either directly or indirectly.
- I am ready to listen to any comments you may have at this stage and I am keen to continue to consult with delegations on an ongoing basis. Let me know your views on the approach I have articulated. This is your process and I see my job as helping you make the most of it.
- I look forward to working with you all to ensure an efficient, effective and productive Meeting of Experts, and a valuable ending of our intersessional programme.

I would now like to give the floor to the head of the ISU, Mr Daniel Feakes, for some administrative announcements.

[Daniel Feakes to make some short announcements]

I would now like to open the floor for any comments and feedback that you may wish to share at this time.
