

**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**

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**Follow-up to the recommendations and decisions
of the Sixth Review Conference and the question of
future review of the Convention**

A proposal for the next intersessional period 2012-2015

Submitted by Australia and Japan

I. Introduction

1. The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) intersessional meetings, which began in 2003, are widely considered to have made a valuable contribution to promoting global efforts against biological threats - prompting a substantial number of regional and domestic activities and contributing to increased security in the biological arena. The 2007-2010 meetings built on and improved the work of the first intersessional process (ISP) of 2003-2005.

2. The intersessional meetings successfully facilitated constructive dialogue and identified activities for the international community's sustained attention and efforts. These activities included:

(a) regular national reviews of implementation measures, including by ensuring the continued relevance of adopted national measures in light of scientific and technological developments (BWC/MSP/2007/5, paragraph 23);

(b) biosafety and biosecurity measures that contribute to preventing the development, acquisition or use of biological and toxin weapons and are an appropriate means of implementing the Convention (BWC/MSP/2008/5, paragraph 21)

(c) education and awareness programs (BWC/MSP/2008/5, paragraph 27);

(d) promoting capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment of infectious diseases (BWC/MSP/2009/5, paragraph 20)

(e) building national preparedness capacities according to States Parties' specific needs and circumstances in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, as well as efforts in disease surveillance and detection for identifying and confirming the cause of outbreaks (BWC/MSP/2010/6, paragraphs 22 and 23).

3. The intersessional meetings provided a forum to bring together the domestic security, health, law enforcement and scientific communities (communities which are not

traditionally engaged in disarmament treaties) and facilitated increasing levels of cooperation and collaboration on national, regional and global efforts against biological-related security threats.

4. However, two shortcomings have been recognised in earlier ISPs. First, the process allowed for only one or two topics, decided at the previous Review Conference, for formal discussion at each year's Meetings of Experts (MX). This lack of flexibility meant that potentially more relevant topics (such as the potential implications for the BWC of the recent development of a bacterial cell controlled by a chemically synthesized genome) could not be addressed during the course of the ISP. Secondly, the outcomes and recommended actions from each MSP were not considered until the next Review Conference. The consequence is that ISPs were not necessarily fully attuned to rapid change in the life sciences and in biological threats.

5. One of the tasks of the Seventh Review Conference will be to build on the positive elements of previous ISPs and to strengthen the process further. Many States Parties have expressed the view that we should build on the success of the 2007-2010 ISP with a more flexible process for 2012-2015 that is more adaptable to our changing world. This includes being more responsive to the rapid advances in science and technology (S&T) relevant to the BWC, facilitating progress on important implementation issues and advancing international cooperation and assistance activities.

6. Therefore, the objective of the following proposal is to refine the ISP, retaining the benefits, while addressing shortcomings and optimising the use of the limited financial resources.

II. The establishment of working groups

7. Our proposal is that the ISP be refined by the Review Conference through the establishment of a number of working groups. There may be value in single working groups covering a number of issues, including; (1) compliance and confidence-building, (2) international cooperation (Article X) and assistance in response (Article VII), as well as (3) an annual review of advances in S&T relevant to the BWC and education/awareness-raising on dual use issues.

8. This working paper proposes that each working group be open-ended, with its meetings scheduled over seven days in August, which would, in effect, restructure the annual Meeting of Experts (MX) to make it more flexible and adaptable, as discussed above. The facilitator of each working group could be appointed by States Parties on an annual basis, or for the duration of the 2012-2015 ISP. Each facilitator would consult with States Parties to specify the topics to be discussed each year.

9. The following approach is suggested as one way to organise the restructured MX:

Day 1: Plenary: The opening plenary would address procedural matters and allow statements by States Parties. The Annual Chair of the MX and Meeting of States Parties (MSP) and the facilitators of the different working groups would also provide to the plenary substantive overviews, including, *inter alia*, each facilitator's vision for his/her working group.

Day 2: S&T Working Group Meeting¹: Annual Review of selected topic: Part I – presentations by visiting presenters from international scientific organisations, followed by a general Q&A session.

Day 3: S&T Working Group Meeting: Annual Review of selected S&T topic: Part II – discussions by government experts of the implications of the advances in S&T on the BWC and education/awareness raising activities on dual use issues.

Days 4 to 6: Other Working Group Meetings: In these three days, there would be six half-day sessions for the formal work of each of the other two working groups (i.e. three sessions for each working group – the first on compliance and confidence-building, and the second on cooperation and assistance). The timetable would be determined by the Chair in consultation with the working group facilitators.

Day 7: Plenary: The facilitators would provide to the plenary status reports on the work of the working groups. The status reports would be in the form of “Chair’s summaries”, reflecting views expressed by the participants of the working groups. They would also provide an indication of possible next steps and recommendations for decision at the subsequent MSP, including on further issues to be considered by the working group in the following year.

10. Following the Meetings in August, the facilitator of each working group would prepare a draft annual report for consideration and adoption at the subsequent MSP. The draft report would be circulated prior to the MSP to allow States Parties to consider any decisions recommended and actions required. This would include the selection of issues to be considered by the working group in the following year. Any decisions taken by the MSP relevant to the implementation and operation of the BWC arising from the work of the working groups would be subject to consideration and review at the subsequent Review Conference.

¹ Further information on the proposed composition and structure for an annual review of S&T advances is available in working paper BWC/CONF.VII/WP.13 submitted by Australia, Japan and New Zealand.