

Meeting 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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English only

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Standing agenda item: review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention

The crucial role of life scientists in the effective implementation of the BTWC

Submitted by Poland

1. Following the Meeting of Experts in July 2012 of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Minister Counsellor Cezary Lusinski of Poland, one of the Vice-chairs of the intersessional meetings to be held in 2012, set up an e-group¹ entitled *Life Scientists are crucial for BWC* with the aim of exchanging views between the scientific community and the policy makers on ideas of how to deal with dual use issues.

2. This paper has been prepared by this e-group to take forward some ideas as to how progress could be made during the current intersessional process. It is recognised that the life scientists are crucial for at least two if not for all three of the Standing Agenda items. The Standing Agenda item on the *Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention* includes a subheading on:

(e) education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology.

which clearly has a crucial role for those engaged in the life sciences. The Standing Agenda item on *Strengthening national implementation* includes a subheading on:

(d) national, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens and toxins.

which is clearly related directly to those engaged in the life sciences. In addition, the Standing Agenda item on *Cooperation and assistance with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X* includes two subheadings:

(e) education, training, exchange and twinning programmes and other means of developing human resources in the biological sciences and technology relevant to the implementation of the Convention, particularly in developing countries.

¹ See annex

(f) capacity-building through international cooperation, in biosafety and biosecurity, and ...

which are both directly related to those engaged in the life sciences.

3. There is consequently no doubt that those engaged in the life sciences are crucial for the effective implementation of the BTWC. After all, the central prohibition of the Convention is to prevent the misuse of the life sciences, and thus ensure that the life sciences are only used for those purposes permitted under the Convention. There is a need to enhance awareness of the global prohibition against biological weapons and of the international disarmament and international non-proliferation efforts in order to minimize the risk that life sciences products or knowledge may be misused or misapplied toward malevolent goals.

4. It is, however, evident that globally there is little awareness of the prohibitions and obligations of the BTWC amongst those engaged in the life sciences. Whilst welcome initiatives have been made by some professional associations – including the InterAcademy Panel Biosecurity Working Group – and by some academic institutions – including the University of Bradford, often in conjunction with the National Defense Medical College of Japan and the Landau Network, Centro Volta, Italy – it is evident that a more concerted global effort needs to be made to engage those who are active in the life sciences to support efforts to prevent outbreaks of disease in humans, animals or plants, whether caused naturally, accidentally or deliberately; as well as those involved in the life sciences and associated stakeholders more generally. In addition, States Parties are urged, at a national level, to communicate the relevant decisions and information to government, academia, industry and relevant scientific associations and professional organisations.

5. We therefore recommend that the States Parties in considering the outcome of the Meeting of Experts in July 2012 agree language along the following lines:

"The States Parties recognise that all those engaged in the life sciences need to be aware of the prohibitions and obligations of the Convention in order to achieve effective implementation and the States Parties agree that:

(a) increased efforts be made nationally, regionally and internationally to ensure that all those engaged in the life sciences are aware of the Convention and its prohibitions and obligations;

(b) steps be taken nationally to ensure that biosafety, biosecurity and the prohibitions and obligations of the Convention are included within the provisions for education of all life scientists and the associated institutional structures and practices;

(c) steps be taken nationally to promote interaction between national authorities and national stakeholders in government, academia and industry;

(d) steps be taken nationally, regionally and internationally to enhance awareness amongst all those engaged in the life sciences and associated fields, including those working outside the traditional institutional and commercial environment, as well as members of the public, of the prohibitions and obligations of the Convention;

(e) States Parties be requested to advise subsequent Meetings of the States Parties of the steps they have taken in regard to the above so that the experience gained and best practices can be shared for the benefit of all States Parties."

Annex

The E-Group Life Scientists Crucial for BWC

The E-Group as of November 2012 has the following participants:

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