

**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**

6 August 2015

English only

2015 Meeting

Geneva, 14-18 December 2015

Meeting of Experts

Geneva, 10-14 August 2015

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

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

**Reviewing developments in science and technology:
Parameters and considerations for a dedicated process**

Submitted by Switzerland

1. The statement by Switzerland under the Standing Agenda Item on developments in science and technology (S&T) at the 2014 Meeting of States Parties asserted:

“An S&T review process is a complex undertaking with a long list of multifaceted scientific subjects that is extremely difficult to carry out in the existing format and the limited time available in the current intersessional set-up. In our view, it requires input from an interdisciplinary and dedicated group of experts. The Eighth BWC Review Conference in 2016 provides an excellent opportunity to discuss, develop and establish a dedicated structure, such as an open-ended working group, that provides for a more systematic examination of scientific and technological developments and their bearings on the BWC. In the meantime, it will be important to develop common views on this issue, and we repeat our call to all States Parties to take an active part in this important debate as well as consider the way forward we are suggesting.”

2. In an effort to help foster such a debate and aid in our collective preparations for the Eighth Review Conference next year, Switzerland has identified parameters and considerations which it believes would shape any arrangement for reviewing S&T developments relevant to the BWC. This paper is intended as a starting point and we are keen to work with States Parties and technical experts to develop more fully the ideas presented below.

Need and value added

3. Whilst Switzerland has welcomed the discussions on science and technology that have taken place during the current intersessional work programme, there is a need for a more effective and sustainable approach. Developments in science and technology play



pivotal role in the continued relevance of this treaty, identifying new opportunities for furthering its aims and objectives, and expending every effort to ensure that the life sciences and biotechnology are not used to develop weapons. BWC States Parties must reflect this importance by providing proportionate time and resources to address this challenge. A technical body under the BWC dedicated to reviewing S&T developments will provide a more robust and comprehensive technical basis on which to base policy decisions and a firmer foundation for the future evolution of this important treaty.

4. Science and technology developments are highly technical in nature, and so should be the process through which they are identified and their implications assessed. Whilst the current intersessional work programme provides limited time and space to comprehensively deal with S&T challenges, addressing these issues primarily within the policy work of the treaty further complicates efforts. More time and a different environment are needed. A dedicated process would help to insulate technical discussions from policy considerations and free up time during an already overloaded intersessional work programme. Making such a process expert-led will help to ensure that discussions remain technical, that the conclusions reached are factual, and that any recommendations made would have a scientific basis. That would leave BWC States Parties well placed for the resulting policy discussions in the framework of the broader intersessional work programme.

5. Science and technology will continue to evolve. States Parties will continuously need to identify relevant developments, consider their implications, and identify any necessary individual or collective actions. As a result, there will be an ongoing need for such a process. The Eighth Review Conference should decide to put in place a suitable, standing arrangement -- supported by realistic resources -- for a structured, sustained, systematic and systemic dialogue on S&T developments.

Process

6. Scientific and technological developments to be reviewed are occurring at an increasing rate. To keep pace, such a process would need to meet on a regular basis. These developments are complex and technical. It will be necessary for such efforts to be undertaken by suitable technical experts. Relevant expertise exists both inside and outside of governments and in public and private sectors. Differences in opinion as to relevance or potential impact of advances are to be expected and encouraged and as a result an environment conducive to interaction and debate will be required. Separating such a process from plenary sessions of the intersessional work programme will help to provide such an environment.

Scope

7. Such a process could review advances in identified scientific fields or disciplines (e.g. immunology or systems biology). Alternatively, it could be tasked with focusing on specific implications (e.g. developments relevant for preventing disease such as vaccines, or in the aerosol delivery of biological agents). Either way, guidance as to what should be considered might come from different sources: States Parties could decide at the preceding review conference or Meeting of States Parties; technical experts involved in the process could propose or agree upon what to review; the ISU could help shape the work to fit a future intersessional work programme and contemporary developments; or some hybrid form could be considered, for example where the broad areas of focus are identified by States Parties but the details are filled in by the experts.

Costs

8. Resources will be needed for such a review process but they need not be excessive. Experts could meet at the same time as, or directly before or after, meetings during the next intersessional process, reducing travel costs, lowering logistical overheads and providing opportunities to leverage their expertise in national delegations. If individual States Parties nominated experts, then they might be responsible for all costs associated with their participation. A revised sponsorship programme might help ensure broad geographical representation, and that the widest possible range of States Parties are in a position to nominate experts. Another option might include the creation of a dedicated fund with voluntary or other forms of contributions. Following standard practice in scientific and technical meetings, a single common language could be used, significantly decreasing interpretation and translation costs.

Guidance and coordination

9. A stand-alone process could not operate in isolation but would require oversight, guidance and support from States Parties. At a strategic level, a facilitator, or Friend of the Chair might provide overarching, continuous coordination and a link through to the broader work of the Convention. This individual might be elected by States Parties for the entire duration of the next intersessional work programme or for a shorter duration, perhaps for a single year. In either case, States Parties could take such a decision in advance (either at the preceding review conference or Meeting of States Parties). Alternatively, the process, or each meeting held under it, could have its own chair, perhaps chosen from amongst the experts using some form of consensus mechanism or election. Again, a hybrid model could be considered where there is both a facilitator chosen by States Parties and a chair elected by the experts. The ISU might provide the necessary administrative and substantive support providing a Secretary for the group and perhaps also taking on the role of rapporteur helping to capture and distil technical discussions. States Parties might want to develop a rotational or other kind of scheme between the regional groups to arrange for the nomination of a chair or facilitator, and experts.

Input

10. Given the breadth of developments of potential relevance to the Convention, no single state, organization, or field would be able to provide all the skill sets necessary to fully assess their implications. As a result, necessary expertise will need to be drafted in from different sources and various regions, ensuring broad representation. On the other hand, there are a core set of skills and experiences that are likely to be needed regularly. Having a core group of experts supplemented as necessary might balance the needs for continuity and flexibility. International scientific organizations familiar to States Parties and with a long-standing history of engagement on these issues might be invited by States Parties as observers to the core group on a standing basis. Depending on the topics being considered, additional contributions from other scientific bodies or individual experts might be requested on a case-by-case basis. Such contributions might take the form of requested papers or presentations. Invitations to provide such input might be made by States Parties (at the preceding review conference or Meeting of States Parties), by the core group of experts, or by a facilitator, rapporteur or chair.

Reporting

11. To help take decisions and shape the future of the Convention, a reliable mechanism will be needed to feed the output of the experts' work into the considerations of States Parties. Such a reporting mechanism would need to be regular and targeted to the needs of States Parties. A report might capture the views of experts, representing diversities of opinion. On the other hand, it could be purely factual, avoiding expert opinion all together and focusing on consensus evidence. In format, a report might be exhaustive, listing all the relevant references and discussions, or consolidated, providing a flavour of debate but presented in a shorter, less technical and more policy-friendly manner. The report produced by the experts will need to include scientific findings where consensus exists, and might make recommendations based upon the technical discussions. The experts might also offer guidance on the classification or priority of the issues they examined. Such a step would be critical for translating the technical reviews into actionable policy and, whilst not binding States Parties, help focus policy discussions. To this end, annual Meetings of States Parties might consider the report of the experts and review conferences might decide upon any necessary action.

Next steps

12. Switzerland stands ready to work with all States Parties on this issue. During this meeting and as part of our preparations for the Meeting of States Parties, Switzerland will continue to consult with delegations, technical experts, the scientific community and the ISU on parameters and considerations which would shape such a process. We hope that a shared view on these parameters and considerations would help us consider what models and approaches would take them into account, and what a more effective and sustainable process would look like.
