

**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**

14 December 2015

English only

**2015 Meeting**

**Geneva, 14-18 December 2015**

Item 13 of the agenda

**Arrangements for the Eighth Review Conference  
and its Preparatory Committee in 2016**

**Strengthening the ability to take action: A realistic agenda  
for the Eighth Review Conference**

**Submitted by the United States of America**

**The need for action**

1. The threat posed by biological weapons is a real one. Technological advances and the diffusion of knowledge around the globe, for all their positive effects, have also put the potential for a biological weapons capability within reach of more nations and terrorist or insurgent groups than ever before. Preventing the acquisition and use of biological weapons requires a range of practical measures, and the combined efforts of the international community. The current BWC “intersessional work programme,” although useful, has proven insufficient to respond to this challenge.

2. There remain deep divisions among Parties to the Convention on important issues. However, by understanding and carefully managing these divisions, the Eighth Review Conference could take important steps that would reinforce our ability to take meaningful action to strengthen the Convention. The history of past review conferences amply demonstrates that the necessary authority to take such steps already exists – what is needed is the political will to make use of it.

**Proposal in brief**

3. **Improve capacity for in-depth substantive and technical discussions:** The current intersessional process tries to do too much in too little time. It does not provide opportunities for in-depth discussion of key issues by technical experts, and progress is, therefore, limited. Dedicated meetings of experts to address specific topics, tasked to submit reports and recommendations to the annual Meeting of States Parties, are a well-established mechanism in other international *fora*. To improve capacity for in-depth substantive and technical discussions, the Review Conference should take action to replace the annual Meeting of Experts with dedicated, expert-led processes to:



(a) Strengthen implementation and enhance transparency and assurance of compliance.

(b) Strengthen international capacities for coordination, investigation, and assistance in the event of a suspicious outbreak or biological weapons attack.

(c) Assess and respond to developments in science and technology, including through oversight, outreach, and education.

(d) Promote and coordinate international cooperation and capacity building, including both under Article X and to support overall implementation of the Convention.

4. **Enhance the Authority of the Annual Meeting of the States Parties:** Meetings of the States Parties already take decisions—for example, on the appointment of officers for the following year, on the implementation of the assistance and cooperation database, and on preparations for each review conference. Lack of agreement on the parameters of Meetings of the States Parties’ authority, however, has had a crippling effect. Parties should agree at the review conference on clear parameters or guidelines to establish what issues can be decided at Meetings of the States Parties, and where another procedure, such as making recommendations to the next review conference, is more appropriate.

5. **Strengthen the Implementation Support Unit:** States Parties should augment the staffing and mandate of the ISU consistent with the strengthened structures described above and with any measures in the four key substantive areas that would require ISU support to implement.

6. **Provide Greater Oversight and Steering:** More in-depth substantive processes, a more action-oriented annual meeting, and a strengthened ISU would require some measure of oversight, coordination, and planning. A Steering Group comprising the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, and leaders of expert groups should be established to support the Chairman, liaise with the ISU, help to identify and prepare issues for consideration at the Annual Meetings, and maintain an ongoing focus on BWC issues in Geneva.

7. The approach outlined above will allow BWC States Parties to take prompt action at the review conference where agreement can be found, while establishing structures that can both support the implementation of those decisions and allow for ongoing intersessional work on issues that require further attention. These ideas are forward looking and ambitious, but not radical. They build on proposals advanced by African and Latin American Parties at the Sixth Review Conference, as well as proposals from South Africa, Germany, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the Seventh Review Conference.

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