

Meeting of State Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement to be made later by the European Union; I would like now to add some remarks in a national capacity.

Mr Chair

As a depositary state and instigator of the BWC in 1968, the UK maintains a keen interest in ensuring that the Convention is global in its reach, and that its prohibitions are maintained. We are determined that the world be free from the threat of biological weapons. This can best be achieved by the universalisation of this Convention and full national implementation by States Parties.

We welcome the accession of the United Republic of Tanzania, which deposited its Instrument of Ratification in London in August this year. That States continue to join this Convention demonstrates its continued importance to international security.

We also welcome the successful regional universalisation workshop in Wellington, which took place in September under the EU Council Decision in support of the BTWC; we are grateful to the ISU for organising this workshop. This event helped underline the importance of efforts to assist states to join and implement the Convention. Such steps are particularly important in those regions where we have several states outside the Convention, such as the Pacific.

Mr Chair

This year's Meetings of Experts (MXs) demonstrated again the value of technical interactions between States Parties' experts. In this respect we would like to recall the presentation made during MX4 on Assistance, Response and Preparedness by the head of the UK's National CBRN Centre. The presentation was well received and led to an invitation to address a regional Workshop in October for ASEAN States Parties on 'Preparedness to Respond to the Deliberate use of Biological Weapons'. This is just one example of how the MXs can help promote common understandings and, hopefully, ultimately lead to effective action to strengthen national implementation.

The Chairs' Summary Reports prepared from the Meetings of Experts provide many valuable technical recommendations for the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. These will serve as a valuable resource for our collective efforts at the final round of Meetings of Experts next year, and for our substantive preparations for the Review Conference.

Mr Chair

A primary aim of our work this week should be to agree the administrative arrangements for the Ninth Review Conference. We believe that a substantive preparatory process will be essential in order to achieve a productive Review Conference, with a substantive outcome; this would mirror the arrangements for the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. Two weeks is sufficient time for the Conference itself. As we look ahead to this important milestone we would like to highlight three issues where we believe that progress ought to be possible: on the need to operationalise Article VII; on the principles of a code of conduct; and on a more structured review process in the next intersessional period for scientific and technological developments.

At last year's Meeting of States Parties, we agreed the establishment of a Working Capital Fund. We thank those States Parties who have made contributions, but we must be clear on the principles of this fund. It exists for short-term financial liquidity to support the work of the Convention; it cannot be used to mask or excuse the systematic non-payment of assessed contributions. We call upon States Parties to address their arrears as soon as possible. The greater financial predictability created by the fund has enabled us to put the Implementation Support Unit on a sounder footing; the ISU remains immensely important to the work of the Convention and we are extremely grateful for the hard work of its members, notwithstanding the uncertainties that they have had to endure in recent years.

To conclude, Mr Chair, the UK remains determined to strengthen the BTWC and we look forward to what we hope is a productive meeting, which will enable us to further our work against the threat of biological weapons.