

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings February 2009

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Eastern European Group: 14:30, Thursday 26 February 2009, Room II (C.108)

Western Group: 11:00, Friday 27 February 2009, Room XI

Group of NAM and Other States: 12:00, Friday 27 February 2009, Room XI

Introduction

- This meeting is a follow-up to my letter to States Parties of 6 February (available on the ISU website), and an opportunity to exchange views on our plans for the year.
- As I outlined in my letter, my three priorities for the year are:
 - to work closely with States Parties to ensure a productive consensus outcome on this year's topic (capacity building) that genuinely promotes effective action to strengthen the Convention and enhance the use of biology for peaceful purposes;
 - to focus and intensify our efforts on universalization; and
 - to increase the level of participation in the Confidence-building Measures.

Preparations for the Meeting of Experts

- Our topic is important: building capacity in disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis and containment is in the interests of all States Parties. It strengthens the Convention by:
 - enhancing international cooperation and exchange for peaceful purposes;
 - improving capabilities for preventing and responding to illicit uses of biological agents and toxins.
- I plan to continue the successful pattern established in previous years, in particular by:
 - sticking to our mandate and making the best use of existing precedents and current working practices, with all decisions by consensus;
 - maintaining a constructive atmosphere of collaboration and common purpose.
- As a first step in our preparations, we need to survey the landscape of our topic, and inform ourselves of current capacities and activities related to disease surveillance.
 - The ISU will once again prepare a series of background papers to help us.
 - If you have any ideas on the sort of information you would like to see in these background papers, or if you have data to contribute, please contact the ISU.
- Second, we need to identify the international, regional and professional organisations that should be involved in our work.
 - Obvious candidates are the WHO, OIE and FAO.
 - I will be working with the ISU to identify other relevant organisations, and I encourage you to make suggestions.
 - I will circulate a list of the identified organisations in the coming weeks.

- Third, we need to prepare to share information on States Parties' national activities and experiences in the area of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis and response.
 - At the Meeting of Experts, States Parties will be able to make presentations on their national activities.
 - I encourage you to provide information in advance, either through working papers or brief contributions to the ISU's online "compendium of national measures".
- Fourth, we will need to prepare for an effective and efficient exchange of offers of and requests for specific assistance and cooperation to build capacity in the area of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis and containment.
 - Please start considering now what *specific* assistance you might need or be able to offer in this area. I will raise this issue with you also at our next meeting.
 - If possible, give this information to the ISU well before the Meeting of Experts.
- It is still too early to make any firm plans on the schedule for the Meeting of Experts, but I encourage delegations to communicate their ideas and preferences.
 - Would poster sessions be useful in exchanging offers of and requests for assistance?
 - Would discussion panels have a role? Any other ideas or suggestions?
- We have already received some requests for financial assistance for States Parties to send experts to the Meeting of Experts, and I am sure there will be more.
 - Participation of experts from capital is important to the success of the meeting.
 - Please contact the ISU if you can help with financial assistance.

Universalization

- I am determined to lead an active, organised and focused effort on universalization this year; I need your help.
 - Delegations may recall the decision of the Sixth Review Conference that requested States Parties to promote universalization of the Convention through bilateral contacts with states not party, and through regional and multilateral fora and activities.
- Direct contacts by your countries with politicians and officials in states not party, especially with counterparts in countries with a close bilateral relationship, are most effective.
 - I strongly encourage you to request your governments to pursue such contacts. At our next meeting, I will be interested to hear back from you on this point.
 - For coordination purposes, please keep the ISU informed of your activities. The ISU can also follow-up your efforts to assist states with accession procedures.

Confidence-building Measures (CBMs)

- Help is available from the ISU to overcome some of the "technical difficulties" encountered by some States Parties in completing their submissions.

- I have asked the ISU, in accordance with its mandate, to prepare an online, interactive "Guide to Completing the CBMs" in time for next year's submissions.
- In the meantime, please contact the ISU if you need help or guidance with completing your CBM for this year (due on 15 April 2009).

Conclusion

- I am confident that if we maintain the constructive approach and collaborative atmosphere of previous years we will succeed in delivering a consensus outcome that genuinely promotes effective action.
 - This is a common, collective undertaking, not something driven solely by the Chair.
 - I want to hear your views and ideas, I am flexible in my approach, and I am committed to full consultation and consensus as we move forward.
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