

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings March 2010

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Western Group: 15:00, Monday 29 March 2010, Room IX

Group of NAM and Other States: 10:00, Tuesday 30 March 2010, Room IX

Eastern European Group: 15:00, Tuesday 30 March 2010, Room IX

Introduction

- This meeting is a follow-up to my letter to States Parties of 25 February (available on the ISU website), and an opportunity to exchange views on our plans for the year.
- As I outlined in my letter, I see four key areas of activity this year:
 - to work closely with States Parties to ensure a productive consensus outcome on this year's topic that genuinely promotes practical effective action to strengthen the Convention;
 - to focus and intensify our efforts on universalization;
 - to encourage participation in the Confidence-building Measures; and
 - to facilitate some preliminary informal discussion on preparations for the Seventh Review Conference in 2011.

Announcement

- But before I start with these issues, I have some important news. As you may be aware, there has recently been a change of government in Chile. One consequence of this is that my term as ambassador in Geneva will end on 14 May.
 - Most regrettably, therefore, I will not be able to chair the Meeting of Experts or Meeting of States Parties;
- This development is inconvenient: it is naturally a disappointment to me, and I expect will be a matter of concern for States Parties. But as the saying goes, "the show must go on". We must press ahead with our important work.
- On the advice of the Implementation Support Unit, I would like to make the following proposal:
 - I will continue in my capacity as Chairman until 14 May, holding consultations and making preparations for the Meeting of Experts;
 - Once my successor as ambassador of Chile has been appointed, Mr. Lennane will write to all delegations in his capacity as Secretary of the Meeting of States Parties, proposing that the new ambassador be appointed as Chairman.
 - If no State Party objects within a certain period, the appointment will be taken as accepted, and my successor will take up his or her duties as Chairman.
- I appreciate that this is an unusual and somewhat awkward situation, but I hope you will understand that it is out of my hands. I would be most grateful for your cooperation and support in minimising any disruption to our work.
 - Before we go any further, do any delegations have any questions or comments?

- Thank you. Now I would like to turn to the substance of our work.

Preparations for the Meeting of Experts

- I would like to emphasise at the outset that 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.
- Our topic this year is an important one with a very practical focus.
 - The topic is: "Provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations upon request by any State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, including improving national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems."
 - As I said in my letter, I believe that a useful way to approach this topic is to consider the fundamental practical question: "*if a biological weapon were to be used tomorrow, how would we, the States Parties, individually and collectively respond?*"
- The topic includes a number of different dimensions (as illustrated on the slide above). First, it can be broken down into *national* and *international* categories:
 - National measures for assistance and response to alleged use, as developed by the governments of individual States Parties, as well as national needs for assistance and capacity to offer such assistance.
 - International measures for assistance and response to alleged use, as developed collectively by members of a treaty or by international organizations, including capacity-building activities.
- Second, the topic can be broken down according to the *type* of assistance and response:
 - Responding to the effects of alleged use: the public health/veterinary and humanitarian response – emergency response, controlling the spread of disease, caring for victims, decontamination, etc. We might call this the "health" dimension for short.
 - Finding the cause of the alleged use: the technical and/or criminal investigation to identify the source of the outbreak or incident. We could call this the "security" dimension.
- In our work this year we will have to consider all these aspects, drawing on the experience and expertise of national and international experts from a range of disciplines and agencies.
- 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 response to alleged use.
 - 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.

- I included a list of some of the more obvious candidates in my letter of 25 February. Based on discussions with my own national experts, I would suggest adding the OECD to this list.
- I will be working with the ISU to identify other relevant organisations, and I encourage you to make suggestions.
- Third, we need to prepare to share information on States Parties' national activities, capabilities and experiences in the area of response to alleged use of biological weapons.
 - At the Meeting of Experts, States Parties will be able to make presentations on their national situation and activities, regulatory frameworks, response capabilities, and other relevant areas.
 - I encourage you to provide information in advance, either through working papers or brief contributions to the ISU's online "compendium of national measures".
- 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.
 - I would suggest that we once again make use of a poster session as a way of providing more in-depth information on the topic and offering an opportunity for experts to interact.
 - 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.

- In particular, with the support of the European Union, the ISU has produced a comprehensive *Guide to Participating in the Confidence-building Measures*. The Guide is available on the ISU website (<http://www.unog.ch/bwc/cbms>).
- Please contact the ISU if you need help or guidance with completing your CBM for this year (due on 15 April 2010).

Preparations for the Seventh Review Conference

- As I mentioned in my letter, preparing for the 2011 Review Conference is not part of our mandated task this year, but neither is it something we should simply ignore.
- It is important that the formal sessions of the Meeting of Experts and Meeting of States Parties stay focused on our mandated topic.
 - Nevertheless, I think it would be a good idea to take advantage of these gatherings of States Parties to begin some informal discussions on the margins to consider how we might best prepare for the 2011 conference.
 - I encourage States Parties, as well as academic institutions and NGOs, to consider organising seminars and workshops in the course of the year to explore options for the future of the BWC.

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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