

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings June 2008

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Western Group: 10:00, Thursday 12 June 2008, Room XXI

Group of NAM and Other States: 11:30, Thursday 12 June 2008, Room XXI

Eastern European Group: 10:00, Monday 16 June 2008, Room XI

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for convening this meeting. As I foreshadowed in my letter to States Parties of 24 April, I wanted to consult the regional groups once more to update you on progress with our preparations for the Meeting of Experts in August, and to ensure that all delegations are comfortable with the arrangements. (Extra copies of my letter of 24 April are available at the front of the room, and on the ISU website.) This should be a short meeting: I have some brief remarks, and then I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

I would like to begin by thanking the many delegations which have provided feedback and ideas so far. I know from my consultations that many delegations are working hard to prepare for the Meeting of Experts, and are identifying suitable experts for inclusion on their delegations, as well as preparing working papers and presentations. I am greatly encouraged by the level of activity, and I think we are going to have a very productive meeting.

As I mentioned in my letter, I have written to various relevant organizations and experts, inviting them to participate in the Meeting of Experts. Replies are still coming in, and I hope to be able to update you over the next month or so as to who exactly will be attending, and how precisely we will organise the working sessions of the meeting. I am sure you will understand that we will need to retain a degree of flexibility on the exact schedule, but I can assure you that my top priority is to ensure that all delegations have the appropriate opportunities for their national experts to contribute to the discussion. We will have the benefit of the perspectives of several independent experts, but I am conscious that the Meeting of Experts should stay closely focused on the needs and interests of States Parties.

I intend to follow the breakdown of the topics outlined in my letter: that is, there will be six working sessions – three for the three sub-themes of topic one, and three for the three sub-themes of topic two. In accordance with past practice, I would propose that the first day of the meeting be devoted to opening statements from States Parties, statements from intergovernmental organizations, and the traditional opportunity for NGOs to address the meeting. On Tuesday morning we would commence the first topic, perhaps using a panel discussion to introduce the issues. We would then move to the second topic on Wednesday afternoon, and continue with it all through Thursday. Again, I would hope to make use of a panel discussion to introduce the second topic. On Friday, we will consider our report, which as I have said previously will follow the same pattern as previous years. The report will therefore be a strictly factual record of the meeting, and will include an annex of the lessons, proposals, perspectives, etc, drawn from the contributions made during the meeting.

To help me refine the schedule further, and to prepare the official programme of work for the meeting, I would be most grateful if you could inform me or the ISU of the statements and presentations you intend to make under each topic. I understand that many delegations are still developing their plans, but I do encourage you to share information with me, even on a provisional basis, as it helps greatly in planning the workload for what will be a very busy week. I would also like to encourage delegations to contribute to the online *compendium of national activities*, which I have explained in my letters and at our previous meetings.

Sharing this information early will help all States Parties make the best use of the Meeting of Experts.

There has been a lot of interest in the idea of the poster session for experts. I am proposing that there be two poster sessions, one for each topic. The first, on the biosafety and biosecurity topic, would be held from 9:00-10:00 on Tuesday 19 August. The second, on the education and awareness-raising topic, would be held from 9:00-10:00 on Thursday 21 August. I hope it will be possible to leave all the posters on display throughout the week, but this will depend on the numbers participating. The poster sessions will be informal events held outside the meeting room, and as such will be open to all: States Parties, international organisations, scientific associations and NGOs. For technical details on the posters, such as recommended sizes, display facilities, and so on, please contact the Implementation Support Unit. I would like to encourage your experts to send their posters, or a summary or abstract of them, to the ISU as soon as possible, so they can be placed on the website. It will help experts to make the most of the sessions if they know in advance who will be participating and what aspects of the topic will be covered.

I would like to say something about broadening participation in the Meeting of Experts. The topics we are considering this year are highly important, not just from a disarmament and security perspective, but also for public health, agriculture, education, and scientific and economic development in general. It is vital that countries from all regions have the opportunity to participate in our work. While there will be a lot of useful information in the reports of our meetings this year, reading reports is no substitute for being able to discuss and exchange information first-hand with relevant experts at our meeting in August.

On 4-5 June, thanks to the governments of Indonesia and Norway, I had the opportunity to travel to Jakarta to participate in a regional seminar on promoting biosafety and biosecurity. I was delighted to meet many experts from around the Southeast Asian region who are working on these topics. These experts, in turn, were very pleased to have the chance to learn about the Biological Weapons Convention and its relevance to their work. This positive experience underlined to me the importance of getting experts from developing countries to participate in our meetings. But they need help. I would like to appeal once again to all States Parties in a position to do so to consider sponsoring the attendance of experts from other States Parties who may have more limited resources. It would be a highly practical and beneficial contribution to our work. Please contact the ISU if you can help.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the need to continue our efforts on universalization. We have had two new ratifications this year: Zambia and Madagascar. I understand that several others, including the United Arab Emirates, Mozambique and Myanmar may be close to ratification. I encourage all States Parties to renew their contacts and dialogue with states not party, so that we can secure additional ratifications this year.

That is all I wanted to say by way of introduction. Overall, I think our preparations are proceeding very well, and I would like to thank once again all those delegations which have offered ideas, advice and encouragement. We are on course for a focused and productive meeting in August, and I am looking forward to some very interesting discussion. And now I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.
