

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings November 2008

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Western Group: 15:00, Wednesday 19 November 2008, Room IX

Group of NAM and Other States: 11:00, Thursday 20 November 2008, Room IX

Eastern European Group: 09:30, Thursday 20 November 2008, Room IX

Thank you for convening this meeting. As I foreshadowed in my letter to States Parties of 10 October, I wanted to consult the regional groups to update you on progress with our preparations for the Meeting of States Parties next month. (Extra copies of my letter are available at the front of the room, and on the ISU website.) I would like to take a few minutes to outline my plans for the Meeting, and then I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Let me begin by thanking you all for your contributions to the success of the Meeting of Experts held in August. The Meeting certainly met every expectation as a forum for the exchange of information, experience and ideas on our two topics. With just under 500 participants, and a broad range of representation from States Parties, international organisations, professional and scientific associations, commercial industry, academia and NGOs, the Meeting of Experts was an intensely productive gathering of minds and expertise. The poster sessions were very well-received, and seem to have met the objective of providing a means of greater interaction among experts. A wealth of highly relevant material was presented, and as you will recall, we faced considerable difficulties in fitting everything into one short week. I would like to thank all delegations for their cooperation, flexibility and constructive spirit. As Chairman, I found the Meeting of Experts was a striking demonstration of the sense of shared responsibility – across all regions and many sectors of society – for strengthening the Convention and reducing the risks posed by the misuse of biology for hostile purposes.

Now, as I said in my recent letter, I believe it is important that we take the opportunity to add value to the work done at the Meeting of Experts. We have a vast amount of pertinent, constructive material to work with: what we need now is refinement, structure and focus. I hope you have all had a chance to look at the synthesis paper I circulated with my letter. This has been prepared on the same basis as in previous years: as food for thought, to help guide your preparations for the Meeting of States Parties. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and of course delegations are most welcome to make additional proposals at the Meeting of States Parties.

Nevertheless, given the broad scope of our two topics, and the large amount of material presented, I think that there would be benefit in a more structured discussion on the proposals and ideas raised. This discussion could follow the outline of the synthesis paper – although I again stress that this in no way excludes the possibility of introducing additional or revised ideas. I have circulated an indicative schedule that I hope will facilitate such discussion, following a similar sub-division of the topics as the synthesis paper. A structured discussion will allow us to focus on the areas most likely to lead to the development of common understanding. It will also help us to develop a report which genuinely helps States Parties to take effective action on our two topics. The official programme of work will be based on this indicative schedule, subject to your views and feedback.

As Chairman, I am eager to ensure that the outcome of our work this year makes a lasting contribution to the efforts of States Parties – and other relevant actors – to take practical

measures to strengthen the Convention and help ensure the safe and secure development of the peaceful applications of biological science and technology. The role and scope of the intersessional work programme are well-established and understood by all: we are not seeking to negotiate binding agreements. Nevertheless, there will be clear benefits for all States Parties if we can agree on a consensus report that, for example:

- clearly states what we mean by biosafety and biosecurity in the context of the Convention;
- outlines the need for proportional measures, for carefully assessing risks, for balancing security concerns against the need for nurturing research and ensuring the peaceful development of biological science and technology;
- recognizes that "no one size fits all", that individual and local circumstances must be taken into account when addressing biosafety/biosecurity and education and awareness-raising;
- encourages the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including government, the scientific community, commercial industry and academia; and, perhaps most importantly,
- lists practical measures that States Parties can consider and draw upon when developing their own approaches to our topics.

These are just examples: there are of course many other themes and ideas that might usefully be included in our report. But I do urge you take advantage of the constructive atmosphere we have developed, to produce a report that will be a useful and practical resource for all those who share our goals of strengthening the Convention, improving biosafety and biosecurity capacities worldwide, raising awareness of biological risks, and reducing the threat posed to global security by biological weapons and bioterrorism.

As well as our work on the two topics, we will also have to consider the respective reports on universalization and on the Implementation Support Unit. I have circulated today an informal advance version of the universalization report: this is intended to stimulate your own activities and reporting, so that we can have a more complete picture at the Meeting of States Parties. If you have any information on states not party and their progress towards accession, I do urge you to please pass it to the ISU as soon as possible. We need to remember that action on universalization was one of the key outcomes of the Sixth Review Conference. I am certainly willing to play my part as Chairman, but all States Parties have a contribution to make. We have had some progress this year, with three new members joining, but we have to lift this rate significantly if we are to reach our goal of universal adherence by the Seventh Review Conference.

An advance version of the report of the ISU is available on the ISU website, and I encourage you to read it. I would also like to remind you that the report includes information on participation in the confidence-building measures (CBMs). If you have not yet submitted your CBM for this year, please do so as soon as possible, so that your participation can be reflected in the ISU report. The ISU is available to help with preparing submissions, and I strongly encourage States Parties to make use of this resource.

In addition to the report of the ISU, there will be a further background paper which provides information on scientific and technological developments that may be of relevance to the Convention and of interest to States Parties. The ISU collected this information in the course

of its research on the topic of the oversight of science. It is available on the website, but I thought it would also be useful to have it published as an additional background paper.

Finally, the Meeting of States Parties will also have to consider arrangements for our meetings in 2009, which are dealing with the highly important topic of capacity-building in disease surveillance, diagnosis and response. The Western Group will be nominating a candidate for Chairman, and the Depositaries will be proposing dates for the Meeting of Experts and Meeting of States Parties.

That is all I have to say at this stage. Based on the comprehensive and thorough work of the Meeting of Experts, we are well prepared for a productive Meeting of States Parties. With your support, I am confident we can deliver a focused, practical outcome. And now I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.
