



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA TO THE UNITED  
NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL  
ORGANIZATIONS IN SWITZERLAND**

To the Permanent Representatives in Geneva of the  
States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition  
of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological  
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction

14 February 2008

Excellency,

I am writing in my capacity as Chairman of the 2008 meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention to outline my plans for these meetings, and to invite you to collaborate in preparing for them. My aim is to continue the successful pattern of previous meetings, and to work closely with the States Parties to ensure a productive outcome that helps to strengthen the Convention and reduce the risk of biological weapons being developed or used.

The Meeting of Experts will be held in Geneva from 18-22 August 2008, and the Meeting of States Parties from 1-5 December 2008. As decided by the Sixth Review Conference, these meetings will discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on the following two topics:

- (i) National, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins;
- (ii) Oversight, education, awareness raising, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention.

These are important topics that cover a wide range of technical and policy issues, and involve many actors at the international, regional and national levels. To ensure that we deal with the topics comprehensively and efficiently, we will need to plan carefully and prepare well in advance. I would therefore like to ask for your active participation and cooperation over the coming weeks, as we work to gather and share information, identify and involve relevant actors, and develop a detailed plan for the Meeting of Experts in August.

### National information and updates

At previous meetings of experts, considerable time has been devoted to presentations by States Parties of their own national activities relevant to the topics. This is a valuable exercise that certainly promotes common understanding. But the sheer breadth of our topics this year means that we may need to adopt a more coordinated, streamlined approach if we are to make the best use of the time available for the Meeting of Experts. I would therefore like to suggest that, rather than preparing individual working papers or presentations on their national activities on biosafety, awareness-raising and so on, States Parties instead provide a brief outline or overview to the Implementation Support Unit. The ISU will compile these outlines into a *compendium of national activities* that will be published on the ISU website and regularly updated.

This approach will leave more time at the meeting for States Parties to make more specific presentations on particular themes or aspects of the topics, perhaps highlighting useful lessons or experience that may be of particular relevance to others.

If this is acceptable, I would invite States Parties to submit their national overviews to the ISU as soon as practical, and if possible by 31 May 2008.

### Identifying relevant organisations and experts

Both our topics have extensive technical dimensions, and directly involve the public health, scientific, educational and other professional communities. To ensure that we deal with the topics in a comprehensive manner, it will be important that relevant experts from these communities are included in our discussions. I therefore strongly encourage States Parties to identify relevant national experts at an early stage, and include them on their delegations to the Meeting of Experts.

As has been done in previous years, I would also propose to invite relevant international and regional organisations and professional and scientific associations to participate in the meeting. For topic (i), clearly the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will have significant contributions to make to our discussion. Regional professional biosafety associations, such as the European Biological Safety Association (EBSA) and the Asia-Pacific Biosafety Association (A-PBSA) should also be involved. For topic (ii), I would propose to invite international and regional academies of science, as well as international professional and educational associations, as was done for the discussion on codes of conduct in 2005.

It is important that we have broad representation from all regions, and I would welcome suggestions from States Parties on organisations and associations that we might approach.

### Background documents

In accordance with the usual practice, the Implementation Support Unit will prepare a number of background documents to assist States Parties with their preparations. The ISU will prepare the following four documents, which will be available at least one month before the Meeting of Experts:

1. Developments in biosafety and biosecurity since 2003 – an update on the activities of WHO, OECD, and other organisations in these areas since the topic was last considered by States Parties in 2003.
2. Developments in codes of conduct –an update on developments in this topic since it was last considered by States Parties in 2005.
3. Oversight of science – a general introduction to this issue, outlining the views of the major scientific associations and other relevant actors.
4. Outreach, education and raising awareness – a general introduction to the various measures that have been used to complement formal legislation and regulatory mechanisms, both in biological science and other areas.

The ISU would welcome contributions and suggestions for inclusion in the background documents.

#### Interaction among experts

A number of States Parties have indicated that they would like greater opportunities for the experts on their delegations to interact directly with experts on other delegations. Indeed, interaction among experts is one of the great benefits of the intersessional work program, and I would be pleased to work with States Parties to maximise opportunities for such interaction.

My suggestion would be to hold an informal "poster session" on the margins of the Meeting of Experts, of the kind often held at scientific and professional conferences. National experts would be invited to prepare posters on their particular areas of activity and expertise. The posters would be displayed in an exhibition space near the conference room. During the poster session, experts and other interested delegates could circulate among the posters, interacting with the authors and discussing the contents at their own pace, according to their interests.

I would be grateful for your views on this proposal: if it meets with general approval, I would like to move quickly in order to allow sufficient time for interested experts to prepare their posters. I would also welcome any other ideas that States Parties may have to improve opportunities for interaction among experts.

#### Sponsorship for participation

The Implementation Support Unit has received a request from a signatory state for assistance to participate in the Meeting of Experts. It is likely that further requests will be received in the coming months. In the interests of broadening participation in our important work, particularly among developing countries, I hope that States Parties will be able to help. Please contact the ISU if you may be in a position to offer assistance.

#### Universalization of the Convention

As Chairman of the 2008 meetings, I have also inherited the mandate from the Sixth Review Conference to coordinate universalization activities. I will be working on the basis of the very thorough report presented by my distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan (BWC/MSP/2007/4). This report identified a number of states which are at an

advanced stage in the ratification process, and another group which have begun the process. I will be contacting these states to encourage them to complete their ratifications in the course of the year. I encourage all States Parties to renew their efforts on universalization, and to use the Report, as well as the information in the restricted area of the ISU website, to coordinate and target their activities. I believe that with continued concerted action, we should be able to secure new ratifications this year.

#### Confidence-building measures (CBMs)

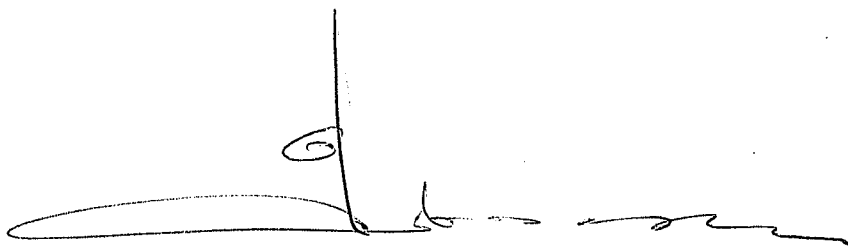
I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all States Parties to participate in the CBMs, and to remind you that the deadline for submission is 15 April 2008. Further information on participating in the CBMs is available from the Implementation Support Unit.

#### Further consultations

I am very interested in hearing your views on how best to prepare for the meetings this year, and your reactions to the various ideas and proposals I have outlined in this letter. I would like to meet each of the Regional groups for a preliminary discussion, and I will be contacting the respective Coordinators to arrange the meetings, if possible during the week of 25-29 February, 2008. I am of course available for bilateral consultations at your convenience, and I encourage you to contact me if there is any issue you would like to discuss. The Implementation Support Unit is also at your disposal for any enquiries of a technical and administrative nature, and I encourage you to consult the ISU website, <http://www.unog.ch/bwc>, for up-to-date information and documentation.

We have a challenging task ahead of us, but with adequate preparation I am confident that we will be able to build on the success of our previous meetings and make a genuine contribution to reducing the risks posed to global security by biological weapons. I look forward to working closely with you throughout the year in pursuit of our shared objective of strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'G' followed by a series of horizontal strokes and a small loop at the end.

Georgi Avramchev  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the  
Republic of Macedonia  
Chairman of the 2008 Biological Weapons Convention  
Meeting of Experts and Meeting of States Parties