



Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)
Annual Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 10 – 14 August 2015
Statement by Italy on Article X

Mr Chair,

Italy strongly supports the need for international cooperation in strengthening early detection and surveillance systems for biological agents which may represent a global public health threat.

Our Country has played a key role in the response to the Ebola outbreak through public institutions and NGOs, also contributing to the success of the EU mobile Lab.

More in detail, since the outbreak of the epidemic, in early 2014, Italy has worked alongside International Organizations and Italian NGOs, mobilizing funds for a total amount of 7.7 million Euros, entirely disbursed. Italy financed the activities of the International humanitarian Agencies which were active in the field, such as the WHO, the International Federation of the Red Cross, UNICEF and the WFP. Furthermore, through the United Nations Humanitarian Response Network we also delivered medical kits donated by Italian NGOs to the people of Sierra Leone.

Our response was mainly focused on Sierra Leone where we provided humanitarian support, thanks to the unique expertise provided by the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Lazzaro Spallanzani". Together with the Institute - but also in partnership with experienced Italian NGOs - we are still working to strengthen the autonomous capacity of local health structures to treat and prevent the transmission of the disease.

Italy participated in a huge collective effort which brought the virus spread under control. However, the epidemic is not yet over. For this reason, in 2015, we have decided to allocate additional grants of **up to 4 million euros** for activities coherent with the National Recovery Plan issued by the Government of Sierra Leone, to build the capacity of the national health system, to prevent the diffusion of the virus and to assist the local population. Also, two soft loans of 10 million euros each have been granted to Sierra Leone and Guinea, thus bringing the overall Italian financial support to contrast the Ebola outbreak in 2015 to a total of 24 million euros.

From a more general point of view, in order to respond to natural outbreaks and possible intentional releases of biological agents, a national plan was set up by the Ministry of Health, with the aim of promptly identifying small outbreaks or clusters of diseases.

Two research hospitals with high isolation capacity and high-level biosecurity labs were identified to deal with highly contagious infectious diseases.

Italy has also acquired a long experience in cooperation for infectious diseases control in the Mediterranean area, as demonstrated by the Mare Nostrum operation, which was particularly successful in keeping a humanitarian, but at the same time efficient approach to health threats control among tens of thousands migrants arriving to the Italian shores after crossing the Mediterranean Sea under extreme conditions.

Italy is also coordinating the EU project EpiSouth, aimed at strengthening epidemiological surveillance and response in Southern Europe, the Balkans, and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries.

Italy supports all initiatives promoted by and involving Member States of the Convention as well as relevant international, regional, and non-governmental institutions – including the EU, the WHO and other UN agencies - which may improve the international capacity to identify and respond to emerging and infectious diseases, especially in the Mediterranean area. In this sense, we fully support effective implementation of article X of the BWC. At the same time, we believe that in order to ensure that such cooperation does not enable activities contrary to the Convention, a system of export controls would be entirely compatible with the provisions of article X. In this view, we have co-sponsored the Working Paper presented by the United States on “Elements of an effective national export control system”.

Thank you Mr Chair