



**Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)
Annual Meeting of the States Parties
Geneva, 14 – 18 December 2015**

**General debate
Statement by H.E. Ambassador Vinicio Mati,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament**

Mr. President,

1. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairman of this year's meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention and to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.
2. Italy aligns itself to the statement that the European Union will deliver later on. At present, I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mr. President,

3. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is a cornerstone of our efforts to preserve international peace and security. The total ban it establishes on the development, production, acquisition, and use of biological weapons is fundamental to contrast the threats posed by the use of biological agents and toxins as weapons of mass destruction. Italy believes that every possible effort should be made to strengthen this regime, so that such threats are met with effective responses. In this regard, I would like to underline three specific points.
4. First, the broader the membership of the Convention, the more effective its regime. Universality of the BTWC remains one of our key priorities, and we urge the States that have not yet acceded to or ratified it to do so without delay.
5. Second, we believe that Confidence-Building Measures remain an essential instrument to promote the purposes of the BTWC. They help demonstrating compliance with its commitments, and are key to increasing mutual trust and transparency. Italy, therefore, supports renewed efforts to increase the participation in the CBMs process. We also support further consideration of innovative approaches to enhance national implementation and build mutual trust, including through increased exchanges of information and best practices.

6. Third, Italy strongly supports discussions on ways to strengthen implementation of art. VII and art. X of the Convention. In cases contemplated by art. VII, we agree that national preparedness in response, investigation, and mitigation of disease outbreaks is fundamental. International assistance, if requested, provides an additional and often essential means to contrast such outbreaks. Like others, we highly value effective coordination and cooperation with relevant international organizations – such as the WHO and the ICRC. Also, during the intersessional meetings, several suggestions have been made on ways to operationalize art. VII implementation. We particularly welcome those concerning the definition of a possible mechanism for the provision of assistance. We recognize that there are important differences between accidental or natural disease outbreaks compared to deliberate ones. Yet, we are convinced that an analysis of the response to the Ebola crisis of 2014 – in which Italy was actively engaged – would provide very useful lessons learned.

7. Italy fully supports the commitments on international cooperation and assistance contained in art. X. Cooperation in biological sciences and technology, including the exchange of equipment and materials for peaceful purposes, are legitimate goals under the BTWC. These could include assistance to develop health care systems adequate to respond to infectious disease outbreaks, or exchange of education and training to develop human resources in the biological sciences.

These and other elements are reflected in the non-paper circulated by you, Mr President, before this Meeting, for which we would like to thank you. We think it is a very useful contribution to our work and look forward to further building on it.

Mr President,

8. The upcoming Review Conference will be a key opportunity to take stock of the work we have conducted in the 2012-2015 intersessional cycle, and to build the bases of our collective engagement in the years to come. We should aim for a strong Review Conference outcome that will outline very clearly our goals for the next review cycle and identify the most effective way to concretely strengthen implementation of the Convention.

9. For this to happen, we will need a robust, substantive, and focused preparatory process that will allow the Conference to arrive at effective decisions. In this regard, Italy is paying utmost attention to the various proposals that have been put forward to contribute to our deliberations at this Meeting. We remain open to further discuss these and any other proposals that will help us to advance implementation of the BTWC.

Thank you, Mr. President.