



Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 14-15 August 2018

MX 4 – Assistance, Response and Preparedness

Statement by Mr. Alessandro Mandanici
Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I would like to add a few remarks on the Italian experience in rendering assistance to strengthen national capabilities to respond to infectious disease outbreaks, particularly concerning the Ebola virus.

Between early 2014 and 2015 the Ebola epidemic caused more than 11,000 victims and more than 27,000 cases of infection in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. Italy played a key role in the response to this Ebola outbreak from the very start, contributing to the related international effort both financially and through the direct involvement of Italian institutions at the operational level.

Our efforts focused in particular on Sierra Leone, and followed a comprehensive strategy that involved the multilateral system (for emergency activities in the health, food security and psychological assistance sectors); Italian NGOs (for diagnosis, treatment and virus diffusion prevention); and the Spallanzani Hospital in Rome, a lead institution in the fields of biosafety and infectious disease, for the strengthening of epidemiologic surveillance.

For instance, Italy financed the World Food Programme to ensure access to basic nutrition for communities affected by the epidemic, the WHO to implement the comprehensive Ebola response roadmap, and UNICEF to undertake information campaigns about contagion risks and protection measures. The Italian Cooperation also mobilized the International Federation of the Red Cross to support the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society for awareness messaging, contact tracing and case treatment. Up to the end of 2016 we also supported the activities of Italian NGOs present in the country. Overall, the Italian contribution to the Ebola crisis totaled 11,7 million Euro.

At the operational level, the Spallanzani Hospital teams supported evacuation operations and addressed the needs of the population with prophylactic treatments and training for local health operators, in coordination with Italian NGOs already operating on the ground and engaged in providing medical supplies to local communities. Earlier, Italy was tasked by the WHO to elaborate an evacuation plan for UN staff in African countries with a high risk factor for infectious diseases. The plan was implemented in conjunction with the Spallanzani Institute, relying on its wide-ranging experience in medical treatment and research. Finally, the Institute set up a BSL 3 laboratory in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, which has later become one of the most advanced laboratories in East Africa for the control of highly infectious diseases such as viral haemorrhagic fevers, such as Ebola, Marburg, and Dengue Fever.

Under its 2017 Presidency of the Global Partnership, Italy continued to attach priority to countries' preparedness against epidemic outbreaks, with a special focus on Africa. In October 2017, and in conjunction with the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative, the Italian Presidency of the Global Partnership organized a Regional Conference in Africa to discuss countries' biosafety and biosecurity priorities in the context of the post-Ebola crisis. The Conference, which was held in Rabat, Morocco, included participants from eleven African countries, members of the Global Partnership and experts from international organizations engaged in the sector – the World Health Organization (WHO), INTERPOL and the Implementation Support Unit of the BTWC. It resulted in a consensus agreement on a set of priorities for future capacity building initiatives, particularly on a regional scale, in the areas of prevention, detection and response. More details of the results of the Rabat Conference are contained in Working Paper 8 submitted by the European Union.

Thank you, Mr. Chair