



Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 16 August 2018

MX 5 – Institutional strengthening of the Convention

Statement by H. E. Amb. Gianfranco Incarnato
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Mister Chair,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment and assure you of my delegation's full support.

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mister Chair,

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is a fundamental component of the international architecture dealing with biological weapons, and every possible effort should be made to strengthen its regime. The first step in this regard relates to universalization: the broader the membership of the Convention, the more effective its regime. Therefore, we welcome all outreach activities conducted by the Bureau, the ISU, States Parties, and international organizations at all levels, and continue to urge States that have not yet acceded to or ratified the Convention to do so without delay.

The BTWC operates in a highly dynamic environment, characterized by fast-paced scientific and technological developments. In such a context, it is essential to endow the Convention with the tools and procedures necessary to respond more rapidly to emerging needs and challenges.

In this view, a strong intersessional work programme is fundamental. Italy was pleased with the outcome of last year's Meeting of the States Parties, which succeeded in outlining a balanced and pragmatic programme of work for the period 2018-2020. We appreciate that such a programme includes both meetings of experts and meetings of the States parties, allowing to address both technical issues and others of a more political nature. For the ISP to achieve its full potential, we believe that Meetings of the States Parties should clearly build on the preceding discussions held at the level of experts.

More generally, and already looking beyond 2020, Italy is convinced of the necessity to identify basic features that would allow the membership to work progressively and effectively. In our view, this would mean maintaining both Meetings of Experts and Meetings of the States Parties, with a clear identification of their respective roles and responsibilities. Yearly plenary meetings of State Parties should also be endowed with the authority to review and decide, as required, any recommendations and conclusions arising from experts' discussions, based on guidelines and parameters decided by the Review Conference.

The ISP should adopt a cooperative approach involving not only States, but also relevant international organizations, such as the WHO and the ICRC. The BTWC does not operate in a vacuum; its ties with other instruments that are fundamental for its effectiveness must be maintained and strengthened.

Together with several delegations, we share the view that S&T developments are becoming more complex, dynamic and far reaching than ever, leading to the need for the Convention to be able to evaluate them in a coherent and systematic manner. Many proposals have been advanced in this regard, including during the 2016 Review Conference, that we believe still merit consideration. Generally, we believe that, whatever its specific configuration, an S&T review mechanism should address both S&T developments that have potential benefits for the BWC as well as potential for uses contrary to the Convention.

Mister Chair,

In Italy's view, more efforts could be invested in strengthening implementation of BWC provisions relating to national preparedness and response, international cooperation and assistance, and transparency.

National preparedness is essential in cases contemplated in art. VII, but so is international assistance. We believe it is important to identify concrete ways to strengthen each State Party's capability to respond rapidly and effectively to art. VII emergencies, including through the identification of a possible mechanism for the provision of assistance. In this regard, we believe it useful to further consider the French-Indian proposal to establish a database for assistance under art. VII, as well as the South African proposal on elaborating guidelines for a State Party intending to submit a request for assistance under the same article.

Italy is also actively engaged in international assistance and cooperation activities falling under art. X implementation. These include programmes on controlling infectious disease, ensuring emergency interventions and biomedical treatment. We remain convinced that effective international cooperation and assistance, relating to both art. VII and X, must rely on increased coordination with relevant international organizations, such as the WHO and the ICRC.

The contribution provided by NGOs, academic institutions, biological and health research centres, which are fundamental sources of knowledge and expertise, also remains critical in BTWC implementation at both national and global levels.

Confidence-Building Measures are essential to promote the purposes of the BTWC. They help demonstrating compliance with its commitments, and are key to increasing mutual trust and transparency. We support renewed efforts to increase participation in the CBMs process, and to allow States to make better use of the exchanged information. We are also open to discussing other potential means to foster transparency and facilitate the exchange of best practices, such as voluntary peer reviews.

Finally, Mister Chair, let me seize this opportunity to highlight that the Convention as a whole and its Implementation Support Unit, whose work we greatly appreciate, need a stable and predictable financial environment in order to function effectively. While calling on all relevant States to abide by their financial obligations towards the BWC, we look forward to an in-depth discussion on this matter at the next MSP, based on the Information Paper that the Chair-Designate has been tasked to prepare in accordance with the final report of the 2017 Meeting of the States Parties.

Thank you, Mister Chair