



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

**Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Meeting of Experts**

Geneva, 29 July - 8 August 2019

MX 5 – Institutional Strengthening of the Convention

**Statement by Mr. Tancredi Francese,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy
to the Conference on Disarmament**

Agenda item 4

Consideration of the full range of approaches and options to further strengthen the Convention and its functioning through possible additional legal measures or other measures in the framework of the Convention

Mister Chair,

At the outset, let me 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, many of which are taken forward in the private sector and public or private research institutions. In such a context, it is essential to endow the Convention with appropriate mechanisms to assess the potential impact of such developments on the regime set by the BTWC, as well as with the tools and procedures necessary to respond more rapidly to emerging needs and challenges. In our view, this means working in two main directions: first, we need to consider the possible establishment of ad hoc processes or bodies responsible for

monitoring relevant scientific and technological developments, identifying both S&T developments that have potential benefits for the BTWC, as well as the potential for uses contrary to its regime. In the past few years, several proposals have been tabled in this regard, including by Switzerland, the Russian Federation and, most recently, by Germany, together with the Netherlands and Sweden. We believe all these proposals merit careful consideration, and an open exchange on the potential structures, functioning modalities, and related operational and financial implications, with a view to a possible concrete decision during the 2021 Review Conference.

Secondly, more efforts could be invested in strengthening implementation of BTWC provisions relating to national preparedness and response as well as international cooperation and assistance, particularly in relation to art. VII implementation, which are both necessary to ensure adequate and timely responses in case of an attack in violation of the Convention.

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.

Mister Chair,

Looking to 2021 and the preparatory process towards the Review Conference, we believe that a serious reflection is warranted on the structure of the intersessional work programme, and on the role of each of its components. Italy has consistently supported the inclusion, in the ISP, of both meetings of experts and yearly meetings of the States Parties, which has allowed addressing both technical and political issues. At the same time, we believe that there are ways to streamline such basic structure, in order to allow the membership to work progressively and more effectively over time.

First, it would be necessary to clearly identify the respective roles and responsibilities of the meetings of experts – more technical in nature – and the meetings of the States Parties – tasked with addressing broader political issues. Second, we could consider returning to the ISP structure of the years 2003-2015, during which each meeting of experts focused on specific topics, rather than on the whole agenda, with all relevant items addressed in a given intersessional cycle. In our view, this would facilitate more in-depth exchanges and avoid repetition, thus promoting a more in depth consideration of all aspects of the Convention. Finally, yearly meetings of States Parties should 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.

Independently of its specific structure and format of meetings, the ISP should further strengthen its cooperative approach involving States, relevant international organizations – such as the WHO, the OIE, and the ICRC – and, as appropriate, NGOs, academic institutions, biological and health research centers, which are fundamental sources of knowledge and expertise. The BTWC does not operate in a vacuum; its ties with other instruments that are fundamental for its effectiveness must be maintained and strengthened.

Mister Chair,

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, while underlining that these and similar initiatives should not be seen as substitutes for legally-binding verification measures, but rather as tools to further build confidence and strengthen national implementation.

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. The 2018 MSP took important decisions in this regard, whose effectiveness will have to be closely monitored. Nonetheless, no measure will be able to address the problem of non-payment; we therefore reiterate our call on all States Parties to abide by their financial obligations towards the BWC in full and on time.

Thank you, Mister Chair.