



Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)
Annual Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 10 – 14 August 2015
General debate
Statement by H.E. Ambassador Vinicio Mati,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Mr. President,

1. Let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment as Chairman of this year's meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention. I would like to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation for a fruitful and constructive debate, and a successful outcome of your Presidency.
2. Italy aligns itself to the declaration that the European Union will deliver later on under this agenda item. Let me make some remarks in my national capacity.

Mr. President,

3. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is a fundamental pillar in our efforts to preserve international peace and security from the potential use of biological agents and toxins as weapons of mass destruction. By banning the development, production, acquisition, and use of biological weapons, the Convention has set up a regime whose universality remains one of our key priorities. Therefore, we encourage those remaining States which have not yet adhered to or ratified it to do so without delay.
4. As decided by the 7th Review Conference of the BWC, this year we will continue focusing on ways to strengthen implementation of article VII, which relates to assistance provided to requesting States Parties that have been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention. The discussions held last year identified concrete avenues that could be pursued in this regard. We also believe that this debate would greatly benefit from the lessons learned from the response to the Ebola outbreak of 2014, in which Italy was actively engaged.
5. As the discussions on article VII have also underlined, national preparedness contributes to international capabilities for response, investigation and mitigation of disease outbreaks, be they of a natural, accidental, or deliberate character. Also, any response to the use or threats of use of biological and toxin weapons requires the effective implementation of the BWC at the national level.
6. In this context, Italy believes that Confidence-Building Measures remain an essential instrument to promote the purposes of the BWC, as they help demonstrating compliance with the Convention, and are key to increasing mutual trust and transparency. In this prospect, Italy believes that renewed efforts are needed to increase the participation in the CBMs process. We also support further consideration of innovative approaches to enhance national implementation and build mutual trust such as voluntary exchanges of information and best practices, for example through the proposed peer review mechanism.

7. Italy considers exchanges in biological sciences and technology, including equipment and material for peaceful purposes, as legitimate goals under the BWC, as well as important elements of international cooperation, as foreseen by Article X. At the same time, we believe in the need to ensure that only activities for peaceful purposes not prohibited by the Convention are undertaken, in accordance with Article III. As a consequence, we are convinced that appropriate export controls are compatible with the provisions of Article X. The legitimate needs of cooperation in the biological sciences or in the economic and technological fields should not turn into illegal assistance in the development of biological weapons.

8. The Biological Weapons Convention operates in a field of constant and fervent scientific and technological developments. Attention to this issue is, therefore, paramount, and we highly favour stronger and sustained links between the scientific and the diplomatic communities. Let me mention, as an example of this interaction, in which Italian scientific institutions are involved the CBRN Centers of Excellence Initiative, established by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.

Mr President,

9. In accordance with the goal for which it was established, the Intersessional Work Programme of the past three years has been very successful in tabling concrete ideas for the effective implementation of the Convention, in identifying issues that merit further discussion, and in bringing to the fore areas where States Parties interests converge.

10. With the 8th Review Conference of the BWC fast approaching, we – like others – would support the establishment of a transparent and inclusive preparatory process aimed at consolidating common understandings on the proposals to strengthen the Convention that have emerged from the Intersessional Meetings. These will form the basis of the road map that the Revcon will have to outline for the next intersessional cycle.

We look forward to this Meeting of Experts, hoping that it will allow us to agree on a viable and constructive preparatory process to guide us towards a successful 2016 Review Conference.

Thank you Mr. President.