



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

**Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)
Preparatory Committee of the Ninth Review Conference**

General exchange of views

Geneva, 4 April 2022

Mister Vice Chair,

Italy aligns itself with the statements of the European Union to be delivered and of Germany on behalf of the Global Partnership. I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mister Vice Chair,

At the time when the Preparatory Committee resumes its work, we cannot ignore that the security landscape has profoundly worsened and is currently deeply worrying. While we are gathered here, Russia's war of choice in Ukraine has claimed too many lives, has caused extensive displacement and has resulted in widespread damage. Italy condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, which is a blatant violation of international law and humanitarian principles.

We are outraged that the threat of use of weapons of mass destruction has been evoked in the course of this conflict and that military action is creating serious CBRN risks for the population and the environment, with the potential for catastrophic results.

Italy highlights its unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, full sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognized borders. Ukraine is a long-standing, constructive and committed State Party of the BTWC, with an exemplary non-proliferation record. We are dismayed that some threat reduction activities in and with Ukraine, which have been undertaken in full transparency and openness, have become the object of fabricated claims and false allegations. We categorically denounce this malicious and completely unfounded disinformation campaign.

In line with the priorities of our diplomatic action, we call on Russia to immediately cease hostilities, ensure safe passage to civilians by agreeing and respecting humanitarian corridors, and to refrain from any action that may affect civilian and critical infrastructures or nuclear facilities. We also continue to call on Russia to engage in meaningful dialogue and negotiations aimed at establishing a ceasefire and humanitarian measures with a view to elaborating a shared and sustainable solution to the conflict.

Mister Vice Chair,

Working on disarmament, we hold a special responsibility and cannot keep silent in front of such warring developments. Italy believes that the international community needs to invest more resources in the international architecture dealing with biological weapons. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important is for us to work together to improve global biosecurity and biosafety.

In this sense, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is of the utmost importance and every possible effort should be made to strengthen its regime and ensure its full and effective implementation. The Ninth Review Conference represents an extremely important opportunity and the international community cannot afford the price of a failure.

Mister Vice Chair,

We appreciate the substantive work and discussions carried out during the intersessional review cycle, which usefully allowed for technical inputs by relevant international, regional and non-governmental organizations. We also wish to thank the ISU for the background documentation prepared in advance of this meeting. Many proposals have been submitted to our consideration and we hope that substantive elements of such proposals, especially those that enjoy wide support by the States Parties, could be considered in preparation for the Review Conference.

The Convention operates in a highly dynamic environment, characterized by fast-paced scientific and technological developments. In such a context, it is essential to allow the BTWC to respond more rapidly to emerging needs and challenges. With this aim, a strong intersessional work program and a strengthening of the ISU are fundamental.

Italy believes that more efforts could be invested in strengthening implementation of the BTWC provisions relating to national preparedness and response, international cooperation and assistance in relation to art. VII and to art. X, and transparency.

In particular, we deem especially important to identify and agree on possible mechanisms for providing assistance to States Parties confronted with art. VII emergencies, strengthening their capability to respond rapidly and effectively. We also look with interest at the possible establishment of a systematic and structured science and technology review process in the framework of the Convention, to monitor relevant developments and assess their potential implications. Furthermore, we welcome the development on voluntary and inclusive Codes of Conduct for Scientists, to prevent misuse of bioscience research without hindering beneficial outcomes.

At the same time, Confidence-Building Measures are essential to promote the objectives of the Convention and we welcome the high number of submissions reached in 2020 and in 2021. We are also open to discussing other potential means to foster transparency and facilitate the exchange of best practices. The purpose of these initiatives is not to replace legally binding verification measures but to help demonstrating compliance with the Convention and to increase mutual trust.

Italy remains convinced that, to address the issues relevant for the BTWC, it is important to adopt a cooperative approach involving not only States, but also relevant international organizations, such as the WHO and the ICRC. Their participation in our work and in the preparation process for the Review Conference is particularly important.

In this regard, Italy also continues to highly appreciate the contribution provided by NGOs, academic institutions, biological and health research centers, which are fundamental sources of knowledge and expertise, and critical partners in BTWC implementation at both national and global levels.

To conclude, Mister Vice Chair,

The upcoming Review Conference will be a key opportunity to take stock of the work we have conducted and to build the bases of our collective engagement in the years to come. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the important challenges we have to face, since we found ourselves in a situation which is far from being ideal. Dialogue and flexibility are more essential than ever.

We stand ready to cooperate with all States Parties to achieve common understanding and to identify a strong outcome that will outline very clearly our goals for the next review cycle and identify the most effective way to concretely strengthen the implementation of the Convention. We need that all delegations fully commit to a productive and focused preparatory process, so that the Conference arrives at effective decisions. For this to happen, it is evident that we need more time and should then assess the possibility of a meaningful postponement of the Review Conference.

Thank you, Mister Vice Chair.