



Rappresentanza Permanente d'Italia
ONU - Ginevra

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Working group on the strengthening of the Convention International cooperation and assistance

Statement delivered by Mr. Tancredi Francese, Deputy Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 8 August 2023

Mister Chair,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment, and assure you of my delegation's full support. Please, allow me also to extend our gratitude to the ISU and to the facilitators on international cooperation and assistance under Article X – Mr. J. J. Domingo (the Philippines), and Mr. Trevor Smith and Mr. Thomas Fetz (Canada) – for their commitment and for the consultations and the work that they have already conducted so far.

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

Mister Chair,

In Italy's view, international cooperation and assistance under art. X of the BWC are essential both to enhance national capacities for the use of bacteriological agents and toxins for peaceful purposes, and to mitigate global biological threats.

In the spirit of the Convention, article X represents a logical complement of the commitment to address disarmament and security issues. We read the call of article X about the "fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information" as a plea for supporting and promoting the peaceful uses of biological science and technology. This constitute a powerful mean to prevent the global spread of diseases and to respond to the most challenging situations, including emergencies.

If something has become clear since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that global crises and global challenges require global responses. Experts have emphasized the unprecedented international collaboration regarding sample sharing for the purpose of vaccine development. The emergency of a disease with such a contagious capacity has required to put all the efforts together, to coordinate the response of the international community and to elaborate a strategy for fighting against this common enemy. It is now evident how no country, not even the most powerful or the richest, can avoid the consequences of this kind of situations. No way exists to self-isolate and close the borders to a virus, and all the mitigation measures require a level of coordination. In essence, no solution can adequately respond to a crisis, if it is not based on a cooperative framework, responding all together and in every corner of the world.

Italy has been among the first countries to support a multilateral response to the pandemic and we should apply the same approach to the prevention of any future crisis, for which the BWC has an important role to play.

Mister Chair,

Having in mind this approach to cooperation under article X, our assistance and cooperation activities under the Convention take place both at the bilateral and multilateral level, in particular within the European Union and as a member of the G7-led Global Partnership against the spread of WMDs. In this direction, one of the two project proposals for funding our country submitted to the GP in March aims at strengthening multi-professional infectious disease surveillance and response, primarily through the development or improvement of in-country and trans-border networks.

In our experience, article X-relevant international collaboration has proven to contribute significantly to mitigation of global biological threats, whether they be naturally occurring, the result of accidental releases (including from laboratories) or a deliberate biological weapons attack. On this point, I would like to recall the working paper submitted by Japan on the Global Partnership (BWC/WG/2/WP.7), referring to a number of activities carried out across the world. Those are concrete projects, implemented to combat WMD-related terrorism and proliferation. Without going into the details, here I wish to underline that those activities contribute to strengthening biological security, in line with art. X of the Convention.

At the bilateral level, cooperation and assistance in the field of prevention, detection, and response to outbreaks of infectious disease are a fundamental part of Italy's development cooperation programmes. Since 2022, Italy has been involving Ukraine's law-enforcement authorities in training and capacity-building initiatives to prevent and mitigate risks across the

whole CBRN spectrum. Moreover, Italy's involvement in preventing and responding to disease outbreaks also takes the form of direct participation of Italian public health and research institutions in international, multi-donor projects aiming to strengthen or develop capacities for disease surveillance, detection, and response. We will be happy to facilitate contact with the relevant institutions for more details on specific projects in this domain.

Mister Chair,

The BWC, as part of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime, does not necessarily covers all the range of challenges related to biosafety and biosecurity, and we cannot and should not operate in closed silos. We should promote synergies between the BWC and other international organizations, avoiding duplication or overlaps.

The BWC is – and could be more – an important instrument, that we need to see as a component of a more complex system, where challenges for biosecurity do not come necessarily from biological weapons. This is even truer when we consider cooperation initiatives, where different stakeholders are involved in many sectors: from pharmaceutical laboratories to agriculture, from zootechnics to military intelligence. In these cases, developing and strengthening partnerships is crucial. Partnership is a key concept for Italy. Partnership – at all levels, with the UN, other international and regional organizations, private sector, civil society – is the most effective way to fully implement our commitments, because it maximizes the impact of all the available expertise and knowledge.

Mister Chair,

We welcome the decision of the IX RevCon to establish a mechanism under the Convention to further facilitate international assistance and cooperation among States Parties. Many proposals had been submitted during the past review cycle and an important level of convergence was reached at the RevCon on the main elements of such a mechanism, as contained in the rev.1 of the draft final document (BWC/CONF.IX/CRP.2/Rev.1). Even if that text did not enjoy consensus in the end, we see it as a promising starting point of our discussion.

Based on the principles I have stated, we stand ready to explore options and to discuss the details of such a mechanism, with a view of establishing it as soon as possible. We thank the delegations that have already submitted working papers on this topic and we look forward to working together - under your leadership and guided by the facilitators - in the next days.

I thank you, Mister Chair.