

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings April 2014

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Eastern European Group: 13:15, Friday 11 April 2014, Room XXIV

Western Group: 14:00, Friday 11 April 2014, Room XXIV

Group of NAM and Other States: 15:00, Friday 11 April 2014, Room XXIV

- Thank you for convening this meeting and for your support for my nomination as Chairman.
- I am privileged to enjoy working with two highly experienced Vice-chairs, Ambassador Mazlan Muhammad of Malaysia and Ms. Judit Körömi of Hungary, and I thank them for their presence here today.
- In my letter of 14 February I have outlined my plans for our 2014 meetings and invited your input and collaboration in preparing them. I would like to thank those of you that have already provided me with your feedback and I hope you may be able to share some of your insights today.

Approach to our work in 2014

- As I noted in my letter, I intend to maintain the tried and tested working practices of my predecessors. I want to work with you to build on the solid platform we have already created together, and I am looking forward to a year of productive work.
- Again following in the footsteps of past Chairs, I hope to ensure that our regime continues to move forward. I will endeavour to expand our membership, to continue to bring in new voices, and to encourage a broader range of delegations to engage more actively.
- I am also hopeful that in 2014 we will identify additional common understandings across all three Standing Agenda Items. I want us to seize every opportunity on offer. I am keen to ensure that we prepare effectively for our meetings.
- I believe the time is ripe to start giving greater focus to the part of our mandate that calls upon us to promote effective action. As we move closer to the Eighth Review Conference in 2016, this year may be a suitable point to turn more of our attention towards options for promoting effective action.
- We also have a new biennial topic: strengthening the implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.

Continuing to build on the work of 2012 and 2013

- I have outlined four ways in which I intend to build upon our recent work:

On universalization

- I will continue to help coordinate efforts to encourage new states to join our Convention. For example, I am organizing a meeting on the margins of the NPT

Preparatory Committee in New York to reach out, among others, to those states without representation in Geneva.

- I encourage you to use your own bilateral, regional and multilateral relationships to further this goal as well. Just as importantly, I would particularly value information on, and feedback received from, your efforts. This will assist me in undertaking the coordination role with which you have charged me.

On bringing in more voices

- Where they have insights or experience of particular relevance to our efforts, we must continue to bring in the necessary expertise from as many States parties as possible, from international organizations, and from other bodies.
- Having considered the relevant common understandings we have identified in the past, it is clear that there is an appetite amongst States Parties to hear, more clearly, the voices of industry and the private sector. I would appreciate any ideas, suggestions, or additional opportunities that you might bring to my attention.
- I have already encouraged you to start thinking about the composition of your delegations, and to think about possibilities for making use of the sponsorship programme – whether it will be as a donor or as a recipient.
- On the sponsorship programme, the ISU has informed me that at present we have had three requests for sponsorship since the start of the year. In 2014, so far no funds have been made available for this programme. May I encourage therefore those in a position to do so to contribute financially to the program?
- Finally on bringing in more voices, I would also like to encourage you to make known to me any expertise, wherever it may be found, that you feel it may be opportune to have present at the Meeting of Experts.

On active engagement

- Last year we made progress in expanding the range of States contributing to our work. In her closing remarks at the Meeting of States Parties, Ms. Körömi highlighted a number of states that had made contributions for the first time. I will be working to ensure that we will be able to report in a similar manner at the end of this year.
- For those States Parties that already engage actively, I encourage you to look for potential relevant collaboration with a state that has not been as vocal. These could provide excellent chances to consider joint presentations at the Meeting of Experts.
- For those States Parties that have yet to engage actively, I would encourage you to seek out your colleagues here in Geneva. I would be happy to discuss with you possibilities for contributions and how they might link to the programme as outlined by the Seventh Review Conference. If it can help in any way, also please do not hesitate to contact the BWC ISU.

On identifying additional common understandings

- The common understandings are one of the most visible outcomes of our work. I believe that both in their own right and as tools to prepare for the next review conference, common understandings are very valuable.
- As we now consider the same topics every year, we already have a strong foundation upon which to build. I believe that there remain areas within those same topics that we can further explore to find agreements.
- We must rededicate ourselves to this task. I am sure there is more that we can do and that there are areas of agreement we have yet to identify. By making use of the approaches, tools and practices that have proven so successful in the past, 2014 will see us find new areas of common understanding.

Promoting effective action

- We are now more than half way through this intersessional work programme. Whilst as I just highlighted, there is still much work to be done in discussion and promotion of common understandings, we must also consider how this translates into effective action in, and between, our countries. In line with the mandate for our work provided by the Seventh Review Conference, we shall identify any aspects ripe for the promotion of effective action.
- I have no preconceptions as to how we might accomplish this, but I am sure that if we work together it will be possible to capture this important aspect of our efforts.
- As we begin to think about how we might further our efforts to promote effective action, I believe that we must move forward transparently, deliberately, with forethought and at a speed with which all can keep up.
- We have a broad range of common understandings already identified by consensus. We have a constructive and collegial atmosphere, and we have our record of success. All we have to do now is to link these to effective action. If we share this common objective, I am sure we can succeed.

Strengthening Article VII

- Turning to the items on our agenda, in addition to the three standing agenda items, this year we start a new biennial topic. Our mandate, as decided by the Seventh Review Conference is: *“How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.”*
- For ease of reference, Article VII reads as follows: *“Each State Party to this Convention undertakes to provide or support assistance, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, to any Party to the Convention which so requests, if the Security Council decides that such Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention”*
- This understanding has also been supplemented with agreements reached at subsequent review conferences. For example, the Third, Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Review

Conferences noted that “*pending consideration of a decision by the Security Council, timely emergency assistance could be provided by States Parties if requested.*”

- In other words, we are discussing how to provide or support assistance to a State Party that has been attacked with a biological weapon.
- Article VII deals with assistance and support. We all know the value of rapid, effective international support to domestic efforts in order to minimize the impact of, and speed the recovery from, such an event.
- We might consider what mechanisms are in use, and relevant capacity present in other regimes and fora, for example by OCHA, OPCW or the WHO. To this end, I will ask the ISU to update background information provided to Meetings of Experts in 2004 and 2010.
- In the past, we have focused heavily on what capacity exists elsewhere and how the Convention might contribute to the efforts of others. Now we should figure out how this fits into our obligations under Article VII and how we might take action under this treaty.
- Should a biological weapon be used against one of us tomorrow, it is important that we know what action should be taken under the Convention, by whom and in what way, so as to ensure the timely provision of any necessary assistance.
- I am keen to hear from you, the approach you think we should take, and what expertise we may need to bring in to help us consider this topic.

Preparing for the Meeting of Experts

- Our meetings seem to be most effective when all delegations know what to expect, when, and how all the various parts fit together. I think our attempts to provide a clear structure for the Meeting of Experts in 2012 and 2013 bore fruit. I do not intend to deviate from the past procedures and practices that, by now, should be familiar to you.
- I would like to reassure you from the outset that I intend to keep to the mandate given to us from the last review conference and to ensure that the overall allocation of time across each of our agenda items will be the same as it was last year. The balance between agenda items shall be maintained.
- If we are to be able to put together as efficient a plan as possible, however, it would be important for the ISU and me to know, as soon as possible, what contributions you are planning to make.
- In return, I will be sharing with you on a regular and ongoing basis how I am hoping to fit these individual contributions together, what international organizations may be present and, on what they are thinking of contributing, as well as possibilities for guests of the meeting and side events. I intend to keep an informal, rolling schedule available to all on the webpage of the Meeting of Experts (www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting).
- I am keen to continue to group presentations according to their theme and content. This will allow us to consider like-with-like and provide an optimum arrangement for interaction and discussion. I am also particularly keen to be able to schedule joint presentations, where States Parties have worked together.

- Once again, I would like to ensure that our side event programme complements, and contributes effectively, to our official work. For that reason, as Ms. Körömi did last year, I am intending to reserve the lunchtime slots on the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the Meeting of Experts, until we have an overview on all the possible uses for them. In consultation with the Vice-Chairs, we will then contact those proposing events which best fit our schedule and invite them to make use of these slots.
- I have also begun to think about what background papers might be useful for our work. I will be tasking the ISU with updating relevant papers from the past and will consider what additional areas we may need to cover. I would appreciate any views or insights you may have.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, allow me to sum-up the key points of my letter, where I invited you to share your views on the five following sets of information:
 - Ideas for approaches and facets of our topics that might be ripe for focusing on effective action;
 - Ideas for approaches and the expertise necessary for considering our new biennial item;
 - Suggestions for international organizations or guests of the meeting for the Meeting of Experts;
 - Details of, and feedback received, from universalization activities; and
 - Details of any workshops, seminars or other events which might support our work this year – either directly or indirectly.
- I am ready to listen to any comments you may have at this stage and I am keen to continue to consult with delegations on an ongoing basis. Let me know your views on the approach I have articulated. This is your process and I see my job as helping you make the most of it.
- I also intend to make the best use possible of my Vice Chairs, whom I warmly thank for their support. Feel free to contact them directly if you have insights you wish to share with us.
- I look forward to working with you all to ensure an efficient, effective and productive Meeting of Experts, and a valuable continuation of our intersessional programme.

Changes in ISU staffing

- Let me now turn to a different issue. As you will be aware, Mr. Richard Lennane, who has been Head of the ISU since its creation in 2007, left his post at the end of February.
- I have been liaising closely with the ISU and with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UN ODA) to ensure that the needs of States Parties will continue to be met.
- In the short term, UN ODA has decided to dispatch Ms. Gabriele Kraatz-Wadsack to Geneva to become the temporary Head of the ISU. Ms. Kraatz-Wadsack is the Director of the Regional Branch of ODA and was the Director of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Branch. She is a subject matter expert and was a Chief of biological

weapons operations for UNMOVIC. I am sure we will benefit a great deal from her expertise and experience.

- It is expected that recruiting a permanent replacement for the Head of the ISU will take some time. UNODA is aware of the importance of this recruitment process. Let me also ask you to inform potential applicants about this vacancy and to encourage suitable candidates to apply.

Reminders and announcements:

- I would like to remind you that next Tuesday is the deadline for the submission of Confidence-Building Measures. So far we have received returns from 16 States Parties. If you have not already forwarded your information, I encourage you to do so at your earliest convenience. In case of delay, do not hesitate to still submit your CBMs after 15 April.
- On the occasion of the Swiss presidency:
Visit to the high containment facility of the Spiez Laboratory, on Friday 13 June (whole day)
Invitation to the whole BWC community, that means, invitation directed to your Permanent Representative in Geneva.
Please, confirm your participation by 7 May