

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings June 2014

Chairman's Speaking Notes

Eastern European Group: 14.00, Monday 16 June 2014, Council Chamber

Western Group: 15.00, Monday 16 June 2014, Council Chamber

Group of NAM and Other States: 16.30, Monday 16 June 2014, Council Chamber

- Thanks to the Coordinators for convening this meeting and to all Representatives for the support in our work this year.
- In my recent letter, dated 28 May I have further outlined my intentions with regard to the organization of the forthcoming Meeting of Experts, in accordance also with the practice followed by the two previous presidencies.
- I have two main aims for our consultations today:
 1. To share with you progress made in preparing for the Meeting of Experts; and
 2. To get a clearer sense of how States Parties see these arrangements.
- To that end, I would like to:
 1. Introduce my recent letter;
 2. Request from States Parties feedback on:
 - how we should deal with the part of our mandate to promote effective action, and
 - what should be included in our effort to consider strengthening Article VII (the new biennial item), given that unlike with the standing agenda items, we have no sub-topics to guide us; and
 3. Distribute and introduce the first version of the rolling, detailed indicative schedule for the meeting.

Second letter to States Parties

- Attached to my recent letter was a draft of the provisional programme of work for the Meeting of Experts. It is closely based upon those we adopted in 2012 and 2013, updated to reflect the 2014 topical subject for the standing agenda item science and technology as well as the new biennial item on strengthening Article VII.
- I have ensured that we maintain the balance between the various agenda items with one full day (or two working sessions) for each of the Standing Agenda Items and two working sessions, over non-consecutive days, for the biennial topic.
- You may have noted that we have only a single session to open the meeting and hear introductory remarks. As I am planning for an intensive Meeting of Experts and we have a great deal to do, I would like to invite delegations to keep any introductory remark as short as possible or, insofar as possible, to make your general observations heard in December when we meet as States Parties, so that, as quickly as possible, we can progress to our expert discussions. I would be grateful if you could convey this message to your capital.
- I also mentioned three background papers to be produced by the BWC ISU:
 1. one on potentially relevant developments in science and technology;
 2. a second, updating past papers on the role of international organizations in the provision of assistance relevant to Article VII; and

3. a third detailing previous agreements and understandings relevant to strengthening Article VII

- Advance copies of all three papers are now available on the website of the Convention (www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting)
- I also distributed a list of participants I think it would be useful to have present at the Meeting of Experts. These participants included the United Nations, international organizations as well as Guests of the Meeting. I would welcome any thoughts you might have on this list or suggestions for additional participants that may help us in our work.
- I would also like to highlight that thanks to recent offers by a number of States Parties; there should be limited funds available to sponsor participation at the Meeting of Experts. (If you are interested in requesting sponsorship under the programme established at the last review conference, I encourage you to contact the ISU as soon as possible.)
- It is usual that demand for such sponsorship outstrips available resources, so I would encourage any State in a position to do so, to contribute to this important programme. (At the same time I take this opportunity to convey my appreciation to those among you who have been forthcoming in contributing to this important tool for our efforts of universalization and broader participation.)

Approach to our work in 2014

- There are two themes from my letter on which I would like to expand.
- *As outlined before I had suggested that we start giving greater focus to the effective action part of our mandate*
 1. I have only heard positive feedback and feel encouraged that as long as we build upon past practice and work on a basis of transparency and consensus, that there should be opportunities to promote effective action more explicitly.
 2. I have been thinking about how we might do this in practice. Firstly, I think it would be important to capture the excellent efforts taken at the national level relevant to the common understandings we have identified. And secondly, I would also like to find a way to explore actions we might undertake together in the future, either bilaterally or collectively.
 3. I think promoting effective action is something we might further consider at the Meeting of States Parties. I am bringing it to your attention now, so that we might hold the concept of effective action in mind during our deliberations at the Meeting of Experts.
 4. I would welcome any reflections you might have or any ideas of how best we might proceed.
- *On the biennial agenda item on strengthening Article VII:*
 1. Our current mandate 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”. We have firm foundations on which to build and I believe it would be useful for us to focus on continuing the efforts States Parties have already begun.
 2. We have already reached a number of relevant agreements at past review conferences, notably at the 7th Review Conference. There were also relevant common understandings identified during our intersessional work:
 - in 2004 we looked at “capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease”.
 - in 2010, we looked at “the provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations upon request by any State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons”.

3. The background papers prepared by the ISU provide an overview of relevant agreements and understandings, as well as relevant capacity present in international organizations.
4. I believe States Parties could usefully provide briefings and updates at this Meeting of Experts on what relevant capacity they might have.
5. I will be requesting relevant international organizations to update the Meeting of Experts on what capacity exists elsewhere, but relevant to the Convention.
6. This would provide a comprehensive survey of capacity relevant to Article VII. It may be that this is as far as we can reasonably expect to get at the Meeting of Experts.
7. I hope that at the Meeting of States Parties we could then work together to start identifying where challenges to effective provision of assistance remain and start looking at opportunities and possibilities to strengthen current arrangements.

Rolling, detailed indicative schedule

- The informal rolling, detailed indicative schedule is a tool with which States Parties should be comfortable as it was used last year.
- It combines details from the programme of work, with up-to-date information on side events, suggested panels for guests of the meeting, as well as a slot for the poster session. As additional information becomes available we will include proposed and confirmed contributions from States, international organizations and guests of the meeting.
- *On side events:*
 1. We have had roughly the right number of requests for the slots available.
 2. There was more demand on certain topics than on others but I am comfortable that the overall result is balanced and covers the full scope of the issues to be addressed by the Meeting of Experts.
 3. In several cases it has not been possible to give those requesting side events their preferred slot but I feel that what we have now links them most closely to the relevant agenda items.
 4. I was pleased that in addition to requests from States Parties and our usual NGO friends, that we have had a request from industry for a side event.
- *On contributions from guests of the meeting.* I expect highlighting when, and on what, we may have contributions from guests will assist States Parties prepare for the meeting and will make it easier for our guests to know what we are asking of them. In general:
 1. For the standing agenda items, I am proposing that we set aside the first hour and a half of the afternoon session on each topic for contributions by relevant guests.
 2. For the biennial item, I am suggesting that we start by hearing what capacity already exists in other forums, and have set aside time to do this at the start of the first session on Monday. We will then revisit this item on Friday morning to focus on the capacity present in States Parties.
- I would also like to highlight the poster session planned for the evening of the first day of the meeting. This kind of fair, or market place, has become somewhat of a BWC tradition and is an excellent way to foster interactions between participants and to explore relevant topics in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Conclusion

- I would like to hear any feedback you may have on my recent letter or the remarks I made today.
- I am interested in your thoughts on how we might more explicitly capture efforts to promote effective action and on my approach to our biennial item.

- I hope that the informal, rolling indicative schedule is a useful tool to help you in your preparations. I would welcome any insights into how we might improve it further.
- I am keen to continue to consult with delegations on an ongoing basis. I need to hear your opinions, what you like, and what you do not. This is your process and I see my job as helping you make the most of it.
- I have also received some positive signs as a result of our ongoing universalization efforts. I understand that just last week the government of Andorra has agreed to table a bill before their parliament to join the BWC. In accordance with the mandate given to me by the last review conference, I will remain in contact with Andorra and keep you informed as to their progress.
- In that context let me also inform you that together with representatives of the three depositary states I have organized an outreach event in New York on 6 May, taking advantage of my participation at the NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting. That gave us the opportunity to exchange views with Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar and Nepal on their intentions and current efforts to adhere to the Convention.
- Finally, 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.
