



Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Centre
for Science and Peace Research

**Research Group for
Biological Arms Control**



Statement by the

Research Group for Biological Arms Control

**Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Centre for Science and Peace Research
at the University of Hamburg, Germany**

to the Meeting of Experts to the Biological and Toxin
Weapons Convention

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Geneva, Switzerland

Mr Chairman, your Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I make this statement on behalf of the Research Group for Biological Arms Control at the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Centre for Science and Peace Research at the University of Hamburg in Germany. The mission of our Research Group is to contribute, through innovative research and outreach activities, to the universal prevention of biological weapons development, production and use.

Our activities have two main focuses: First, we work to prevent the erosion of the universal bioweapons prohibition by opposing activities that violate treaty obligations. Second, we develop new concepts and instruments to monitor activities relevant to bioweapons, and to verify and enforce compliance with the regulations against them.

Mr Chairman,

We are pleased to see that the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) is making progress with regards to universalisation. Currently, 173 states have become party to the Convention. We encourage the States Parties to further support the **universalisation of the BWC** to globally facilitate the prevention of misuse of biology and to promote worldwide cooperation for the peaceful application of biotechnology. Therefore, we sincerely hope to see all remaining non-member states joining the treaty.

Mr Chairman,

An important Standing Agenda Item of the current Intersessional Process is the review of new developments in science and technology of relevance to the BWC. Due to the rapid development in the field of biology and especially in the life sciences this review process becomes a challenging task and requires the appropriate resources. In this regard, we see the need for an **improved science and technology review mechanism** that is adapted to the requirements of the BWC. The new genome editing toolset based on the CRISPR gene targeting system is one recent example of a new technology which shows both a strong beneficial and a clear dual-use potential.

We encourage the States Parties to consider a more efficient review system, which would involve an interdisciplinary team of experts, and to take into consideration the experiences of other international arms control regimes, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention. In such a framework, the regular exchange of views and the sharing of expertise amongst arms control experts that have a different professional background

would be an additional valuable asset.

In this regard, the interaction between diplomats, scientists, and other non-governmental actors during the annual meetings of the Intersessional Process was already one important improvement of the BWC regime. We encourage the States Parties to find consensus during the upcoming 8th Review Conference to keep this successful format. Altogether, this would help to further promote the evolution of an **efficient science and technology oversight mechanism** under the BWC.

Mr Chairman,

Given the absence of a verification mechanism within the BWC regime, a number of States Parties is looking for complementary ways to demonstrate compliance with the BWC. In addition to the established Confidence Building Measures, activities like the peer review system evaluated by some States Parties could contribute to the evolution of the Convention.

We believe that **all States Parties** should benefit from an **active participation** in any kind of actions that foster trust. New ways to monitor compliance with the Convention should be based on an unbiased and non-discriminatory approach involving a worldwide network of contributors. This could include the use of open source information to continuously monitor compliance-relevant issues in order to increase public transparency and thus strengthen confidence in the compliance with the regime obligations.

We warmly welcome the continuous support of States Parties of academic and other non-governmental stakeholders to further develop appropriate alternative methods for the assessment of compliance with the BWC.

Mr Chairman,

We carefully followed the discussions last year about a proposal to find a common understanding on the necessary requirements for an additional protocol, and the possible range of subjects encompassed by such a legally-binding instrument. Although we see the potential of this proposal in bringing about further development within the BWC, we felt the somewhat reserved enthusiasm of a number of States Parties to take this process further, due to unsolved technical and political questions. We recognize and understand the obstacles that might hinder the member states of the Convention to re-enter negotiations. Nevertheless, we encourage the States Parties to take **whatever steps necessary to further strengthen the BWC** and to maintain the complete ban of biological and toxin weapons.

Thank you, Mr Chairman!