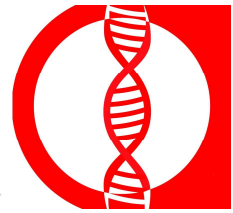


**Research Group for
Biological Arms Control**



Statement by the
Research Group for Biological Arms Control
Hamburg University

to the Sixth Review Conference of the States Parties to the
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

November 2006

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

Let me start by thanking you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am making this statement on behalf of the Research Group for Biological Arms Control at Hamburg University, Germany. Our aim is to contribute to the universal prevention of biological weapon development, production and use. The development of new verification and compliance strategies and concepts and concrete verification measures is our core research area.

As of 2001 and the failed negotiation of the Ad Hoc Group Protocol the word “verification” has been stigmatized. It is now rarely uttered in this room. Nevertheless, measures to ensure compliance through monitoring the activities of and within Member States are still the key to strengthen the Convention. We have no illusions and understand the difficulties with meeting consensus on a comprehensive regime. However, progress is possible both in already agreed measures and, more importantly in new approaches. In this pursuit, civil society should strive to provide important contributions to your discussions.

We would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to particularly important aspects of the convention in which progress must and can be made, namely increasing transparency; and promoting politically and legally binding measures. The BWC is the only internationally agreed tool to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons and as such, it must become the universal standard upheld by all countries. Furthermore, all Member States need to develop the adequate national legislation. We see the need and possibility to strengthen the Convention in three areas: the confidence building measures (CBM), trade monitoring of dual-use items, and biosecurity measures in life science research.

At the moment the best instrument to foster transparency in the BWC are the CBMs. While they are the only agreed data exchange mechanism under the convention, they have not proved their worth in making relevant activities more see-through. Here at the Sixth Review Conference, common ground must be found in the fact that CBMs need reform. The forms themselves should be redesigned, as should the process which constitutes their compilation, collection, distribution and use. Any reforms should be adopted with the aim of making participation within the regime universal. The intersessional process is the right forum in which to discuss these reforms and any agreed changes should be translated immediately into the CBM mechanism rather than this decision being remanded to the 7th Review Conference in 2011. Our Research Group is currently concluding a project on developing recommendations on how to improve the CBMs. We would like to thank you for the support and advice we have received.

Other transparency measures can be developed outside the Biological Weapons Convention’s (BWC) context using open source data. With relatively little efforts, such as sharpening existing classification systems for traded items, cross-border flows of relevant equipment could be monitored in order to increase transparency and give indications of compliance. Due to developments in information technology the vast amount of global trade data is available in open-source databases and could be analysed by a technical secretariat. Such a trade monitoring system would be very much different from existing export controls as relevant publicly available data from all states would passively and indistinctively become the subject of monitoring – it does not impede exports or imports *per se*. Eventually a future trade monitoring system could be integrated into the UN system.

One particularly important aspect of the dual-use dilemma in the biological area is the potential contribution of scientific publications to activities prohibited under the Convention. While utmost openness and transparency is a key prerequisite for both, scientific progress and arms control, some scientific information present a high risk of abuse for malign purposes and should not be published in all details, or, even better, should not be generated in the first place. In recent years, editors of life science journals have engaged in self-governance efforts to tackle this problem and committed themselves to establishing biosecurity measures. Yet, in the course of a current research project we found that formal biosecurity policies are still the exception. In addition hardly any progress had been made with regards to an internationally agreed biosecurity mechanism through which experiments of concern could be stopped early on. Agreed rules and recommendations should be developed because at the moment it is doubtful that the scientific press is in a position to effectively prevent the distribution of sensitive scientific information with a high risk of abuse.

Realising that any large step towards strengthening the convention might derail discussions if not all parties are satisfied, we believe that small, but decisive steps in the right direction are the best approach. This means making additional treaty-strengthening measures legally binding for all Member States, or if not, ensuring that there is adequate political motivation to move all countries to participate. Nevertheless, multilateral verification is indispensable for long-term sustainable national and global security and should, therefore be the aim of any BWC evolution.

I thank you for your attention.