

**Biological Weapons Convention  
Eighth Review Conference  
7-25 November 2016  
NGO Statements**



Mr President, Distinguished Representatives:

The University of London\* appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this Review Conference through the NGO Statements. We welcome your call to States Parties, in your letter of 6 October, "to consider how best we can work to ensure that the Review Conference makes a significant and sustainable contribution to improving the implementation of the BWC." Our statement is accordingly organised around these two criteria.

***A significant contribution***

The first contribution we ask of the Conference is to welcome the transparency initiatives some States Parties have taken to provide reassurance that they themselves are implementing all Articles of the Convention. They have done this in various ways, from peer review to compliance assessment, from implementation review to on-site compliance visits. All these initiatives have three things in common: they are voluntary, they are innovative, and they are designed to provide reassurance through transparency. Through sharing these experiences States Parties may develop a common understanding as to how best to reassure one another, and the wider world, that they are indeed fully compliant with their BWC obligations. We ask the Conference to give a wholehearted welcome to what has been pioneered already and to ensure that the process continues by setting up an Open-Ended Working Group on Providing Reassurance. This OEWG should aim to encourage participation and transparency, focussed on the concept and practice of reassurance as a key element in strengthening the BWC.

The second contribution we recommend is a decision to organise the review of relevant developments in science and technology (S&T) more systematically, and resource it more fully, through an Open-Ended Working Group on S&T professionally served by a Scientific Secretary in the ISU. We recognise the work that has gone into examining proposals for different ways of improving the S&T review process but now is the time for decision.

The third significant contribution we hope the Conference will make concerns the CBMs. Many well-considered proposals for improvement were left over from the Seventh Review Conference and fell outside the very narrow mandate of the biennial item on CBMs in the last intersessional process. We recommend a Technical Working Group on CBMs to revise the forms as necessary, further develop the electronic platform and continue fine-tuning the CBM process so that it succeeds in actually building confidence. This could be seen as an Appendix to the Conference, like the 1987 meeting which "finalised the modalities" of the original CBMs.

And fourthly we recommend a decision to strengthen this new intersessional structure with a Steering Committee. This would bring together what up to now have been the loosely distributed tasks of various office-holders. Together they should be mandated to watch over the health of the Convention and promote its constructive evolution, acting on behalf of all the States Parties and the wider BWC community. The Steering Committee we envisage would work closely with the ISU and report to each Annual Meeting.

***A sustainable contribution***

Mr President, we applaud your emphasis on a sustainable contribution because otherwise there is a danger that any fresh impetus the Conference gives to the BWC will be quickly dissipated, long before 2021. Sustainability rests in large part, as always, on the depth of commitment of States Parties and their readiness to demonstrate that commitment in practice. But it also rests in part on the adequacy of the supporting structures. If these are weak the BWC will not prosper. Only this Conference has the authority to set up subsidiary bodies, determine their

functions and give them the resources to carry out those functions effectively. We strongly encourage the Conference to use that authority.

Specifically, the Annual Meeting of States Parties needs a mandate enabling it to take decisions within the framework set by the Review Conference. It has already taken decisions on the dates and chairing of meetings within the intersessional period and, last December, on improving the preparatory process for this Conference. Now it should be empowered to take decisions on such matters as adjustments to the detail of the intersessional work programme, as recommended by its Open-Ended Working Groups or the Steering Committee, and to give effect to the recommendations of the Technical Working Group on CBMs. It should also be authorised to make recommendations for action to the States Parties, year by year, and not have to wait until the Ninth Review Conference. The consensus rule would continue to apply to the Annual Meeting, as it does here, so there is no reason to fear that giving limited powers of decision-making to the Annual Meeting could disadvantage any State Party or detract from the authority of the Review Conference.

In the case of the Implementation Support Unit, it is resources of extra staff and a realistic budget that are needed. We recommend the renewal of its mandate along existing lines but adapted to enable it to give professional support to the new Working Groups and Steering Committee as well as to the Annual Meeting. What holds back the ISU from making a more sustainable contribution is under-resourcing. It has done its best but is hampered by having too small a staff and an inadequate budget. Five years ago the Seventh Review Conference added new tasks but in effect, at the last minute, refused to pay for them. As a result, the ISU has had to draw attention in each of its annual reports to the work it has not been able to do, for lack of resources. To fund a staff of five would merely restore the ISU to where it ought to have been throughout the last intersessional period. We therefore encourage this Conference to treat five, rather than three, as the baseline from which to calculate the extra number needed to give adequate support to the new structure, and to enable the ISU to function on a secure and sustainable basis.

A realistic budget for the BWC would still only ask of States Parties less than 5% of what almost all of them are required to contribute to the OPCW as parties to the CWC. Even allowing for major differences between the two Conventions in respect of international verification and permanent institutions, this is surely quite disproportionate: the BWC is not that much less important than the CWC. But to run the BWC on an inadequate budget suggests it is; and so sends completely the wrong signal. The disparity is unacceptably large: it ought to be reduced, by decision of this Conference.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Mr President, we wish you and the Conference success in achieving your twin goals of a significant contribution and a sustainable contribution, so that the BWC can realise its latent potential and become the treaty to which its advocates in the disarmament community and the professions of science have so long aspired.

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\* The University of London dates from 1836, and is a major component of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and beyond. It has evolved into a confederation of academically and financially autonomous colleges, which continue to share some central University of London institutions and a long history of joint endeavours in education and research. University College London (founded 1826) and King's College London (founded 1829) were the original colleges of the University of London, while the London School of Economics & Political Science (founded 1895) joined in 1900.