

Joint NGO Position Paper to Biological Weapons Convention
Meetings of Experts
Geneva
7-16 August 2018

Disarmament has been given a significant political boost through the UN Secretary-General's major new policy initiative *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. We encourage all States Parties to the BWC to take full advantage of the political opportunities that the initiative affords to reinvigorate and further strengthen the Convention, and perceptions of it, as the principal forum for managing security risks of biology in the 21st century.

This position paper sets out the NGO community's collective views on key action points for the 2018 Meetings of Experts.

On **cooperation and assistance (MX1)**, we encourage States Parties to:

- Develop a common format for Article X reporting, delineating state requirements and activities.
- Establish an ISU Cooperation Officer, mandated and resourced to play a more active role in promoting contacts and programmes for scientist exchange and in identifying opportunities for capacity-building and funding.
- Facilitate regional S&T dialogues focused on regional BWC-related interests and problems drawing in regional and international expertise to exchange information and stimulate collaboration and cooperation.
- Cooperate and collaborate with non-governmental entities.
- Establish an Open-Ended Working Group on Cooperation to meet at regular intervals to identify opportunities for, and good practices in, international cooperation, and to promote capacity-building opportunities.

On **developments in science & technology (MX2)**, we encourage States Parties to:

- Establish an International Biosecurity Advisory Board to act as a global focal point for oversight of dual use research—separate from, but liaising with, WHO efforts in this area.
- Develop international guidelines on the conduct of biological research with high misuse potential as a means to strengthen compliance, and confidence of compliance, with the BWC.
- Establish a mechanism for feeding in relevant state and NGO initiatives to BWC meetings.

Exemplary initiatives include:

- The InterAcademy Partnership (IAP)'s initiative on assessing the security implications of genome editing technology:
<http://www.interacademies.org/43251/Assessing-the-Security-Implications-of-Genome-Editing-Technology-Report-of-an-international-workshop>
- Switzerland's biennial workshop series on advances in biology and chemistry and their implications for disarmament:
<https://www.labor-spiez.ch/en/rue/enruesc.htm>

- Establish an ISU Science Officer, mandated and resourced to analyse BWC-relevant trends in science and technology developments, and to facilitate other S&T activities associated with the BWC.
- Support the development of science policy as a means to: raise awareness of the security dimension of biological and life-science research; promote research integrity; foster a culture of responsibility; and enhance accountability practices.
- Support initiatives to develop an aspirational code for life scientists similar to the Hague Ethical Guidelines developed recently for chemists, and, building on ideas developed by the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, support initiatives to develop active learning systems to engage life scientists in support of codes of conduct, responsible science and the BWC.
- Support the initiatives and efforts within the UNGA First Committee to establish an Emerging S&T Security Forum focused on security challenges associated with the advances in a broad range of sciences, including the biological and life sciences, neuro- and cognitive sciences (artificial intelligence), materials science, nanotechnology, mechanical engineering and robotics, IT and communications (big data).
- Encourage the convening of a UN-led high-level summit on science & security with the objective to: issue declarations by governments of science and security as a global priority; reach agreement on the responsible use of science and technology for the benefit of humankind; establish a UN-coordinated network of experts focused on peace and security with representatives from international organisations, non-governmental organisations, national academies of sciences, academia and private industry; and develop a UN agenda, linked to relevant 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, for how to best manage advances in science and technology in the next 10-25 years.

On **national implementation (MX3)**, we encourage all States Parties to:

- Adopt and enforce the necessary legal measures, in accordance with their constitutional processes, to prohibit and prevent the development, production, use, stockpiling, transfer and acquisition of biological weapons and to secure biological agents and toxins in peaceful activities.
- Share national experiences, challenges and initiatives to adopt legal measures giving effect to the BWC, share relevant laws and regulations, and report them under the CBM mechanism.
- Share national experiences, challenges and initiatives associated with education and awareness-raising, codes of conduct for life scientists, biosafety and biosecurity measures, and legislative and administrative provisions which are designed to prevent and prohibit the development, production, use, stockpiling, transfer and acquisition of biological weapons and which secure biological agents and toxins in peaceful activities in order to develop an international repertoire of best practices.
- Develop national action plans, and subsequently implementation plans, to strengthen national implementation that are multisectoral and include the local relevant NGO community.
- Continue to substantively engage with, and support, the NGO community and Parliamentarians who are demonstrating a significantly increasing capacity and effectiveness in promoting universality and implementation of the BWC, as well as facilitating submission of CBMs by States Parties.

- Consider mechanisms to proactively disclose information and communicate to the international community the intent of biodefence activities which may have a high misuse potential.
- Reinvigorate and expand the CBM mechanism with a view to enhance the annual information exchange process so that it better communicates 'grey-area' biodefence activities.
- Endorse and increase participation in 'interactive' information exchanges, such as compliance assessment, peer review, implementation review and facility visits.
- Encourage national compliance reviews by independent experts, where the process of reaching compliance judgments is explicitly delineated.

On **assistance, response and preparedness (MX4)**, we encourage States Parties to:

- Share national experiences, challenges and initiatives associated with assistance, response and preparedness efforts in order to develop an international repertoire of best practices.
- Develop action plans, and subsequently implementation plans, to strengthen national, regional and international capacities in the early identification, response and mitigation of disease outbreaks, whether natural or deliberate in origin.
- Discuss in a serious and constructive manner the UN Secretary-General's proposal to establish a core standing coordinating capacity within the UN to conduct independent investigations of any alleged use of biological weapons.
- Discuss in a serious and constructive manner the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs' efforts associated with the development of a framework that ensures a coordinated international response following the use of biological weapons.

On **institutional strengthening (MX5)**, we encourage States Parties to:

- Pay assessed contributions in full and on time, to ensure that the limited 'institutions' the BWC already has, namely the ISU and the relevant part of the UN conference budget for a few days of BWC meetings each year, are reliably resourced.
- Enable the ISU to make more substantial contributions by enlarging its staff to include at minimum a Cooperation Officer and a Science Officer, and significantly increasing its operating budget, to match its already mandated functions and the BWC's needs identified through this intersessional work programme.
- Give MSPs a mandate to enable decision-taking on such matters as adjustments to the detail of the intersessional work programme, and to make recommendations for actions to be taken by the States Parties during the intersessional period.
- Consider the totality of the current multilateral anti-biological weapons regime, and how best to shape its evolution in light of scientific advances, increased globalisation of the biotechnology and military industry sectors, a more complex world order, novel weapon concepts and other global trends.
- Consider, in an open-minded discussion, possible future structures for institutional strengthening which takes account of the full range of approaches and options, and is geared to the practicalities of making the BWC work more effectively, and with enhanced transparency, so as to provide greater levels of reassurance that the biological disarmament regime is robust and secure.

Joint NGO Position Paper Endorsed by:

Institutional endorsers

Biosecure Ltd, United Kingdom
Centre for Arms Control and Non-proliferation (CACNP), USA
Disarmament and Security Centre, New Zealand
Foundation for the Development of Biotechnology and Genetics (POLBIOGEN), Poland
Hamburg University Research Group for Biological Arms Control, Germany
International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA)
International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES)
Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, USA
Landau Network-Fondazione Volta, Italy
Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
The Trench, France
VERTIC, United Kingdom
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In Memoriam: Dr Volker Beck

By Una Becker and Filippa Lentzos

We were deeply saddened to learn of the loss of Volker Beck in late December 2017. Volker Beck was a dedicated advocate of biological disarmament, who many of us in the NGO community had the privilege to work alongside for many years.

There are few people in the world who have participated in as many BWC meetings in Geneva as Volker Beck. He was involved in the protocol negotiations from the very beginning. He was there when the 'intersessional process' was invented. He played a major part in efforts to improve the CBMs so that they really would build confidence, and, in more recent initiatives, to open biodefence facilities to reassure peers in the international community of their compliance with the BWC. And while he claimed to have retired after the 7th Review Conference in 2011, he still appeared from time to time, and was also present at the last BWC meeting in December, active as always.

Volker Beck was an experts' expert, and he shared his extensive knowledge and experience willingly. He always had very clear ideas about the direction in which the BWC, and biosecurity policy more generally, should travel. He had equally clear ideas about the practical steps that could and should be taken to get there. Volker Beck often spoke bluntly, but with humor and a twinkle in his eye, and always with great conviction. Listening to him, it was obvious that for him the BWC was much more than a 'job' that needed to be done and whose conferences you had to attend. He had a passion for this treaty and his departure leaves a tremendous vacuum in the field of biological disarmament. He will be deeply missed.

The NGO community, with the support of the German delegation, has arranged a commemorative book for delegates and experts who would like to pay tribute to Dr Beck and to share their memories of him with the BWC community. You are all warmly invited to sign the book. It is available at the back of the room and will remain there for the duration of the MXs. Following the meetings, the book will be sent to Mrs Beck.