

Statement on Biological Weapons
UN General Assembly First Committee
New York
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Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives,

The BWC Meetings of Experts convened this past summer saw very constructive and substantive discussions. Delegations were willing to engage in interactive debate, as they had done at the 2018 Meetings of Experts. In an unanticipated development, however, the 2018 Meeting of States Parties was unable to reach a consensus on the deliberations of the expert meetings, including on any possible outcomes.

We regard this lack of a substantial outcome document in 2018 as highly regrettable. It is certainly not reflective of the considerable preparations and substantial discussions that took place, nor of the wishes of the States Parties, save one. We therefore urge States Parties to consider ways to ensure this does not repeat itself at the upcoming Meeting of States Parties in December. One way to deal with this problem would be to develop a different kind of meeting report, in which consensus recommendations and proposals are prominently noted, and those which do not achieve consensus are also clearly stated and acknowledged.

Mr Chair,

Upholding the norm against biological weapons is becoming more important than ever. Rapid advances in science and technology continue to enable more readily accessible and potentially more destructive biological weapons. First Committee delegations must unequivocally reaffirm their commitment to the 1925 Geneva Protocol and to the BWC, and implement these in national legislation. We also encourage First Committee delegations to report on measures taken to implement and strengthen BWC provisions.

Mr Chair,

The financial situation of the BWC remains critical. We welcome the measures endorsed at the 2018 BWC Meeting of States Parties to encourage timely payment, ensure liquidity and avoid deficit spending or accumulation of liabilities. We are encouraged by contributions to the recently established Working Capital Fund, and we congratulate the contributing States Parties for their leadership. We urge States Parties to continue their efforts to secure the financial predictability and sustainability of future BWC meetings and of the Implementation Support Unit.

Mr Chair,

Beyond the First Committee, States Parties should, first, establish a dedicated technical body to monitor relevant scientific and technological developments, to consider their potential bearings on the BWC, and to formulate individual and collective action to address possible challenges. Second, States Parties should strengthen information-sharing through the BWC's Confidence-Building Measures, and through voluntary peer review and transparency visits, as well as further develop and evolve the consultation and clarification procedures under BWC Article V. Third, States Parties should strengthen national and international assistance, response and preparedness efforts, including the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for the investigation of alleged use of biological weapons.

Finally, Mr Chair, civil society has played an increasingly important role in recent years in efforts to strengthen the BWC, including through the Intersessional Process and through promoting universality and implementation of the BWC, which has been widely acknowledged. We, therefore, strongly encourage all States Parties to continue to support, and engage closely with, civil society to achieve these mutually sought goals, and in all other ways in which efforts are being made to strengthen the Convention.

We thank you for your attention.