

**Joint NGO Statement to Biological Weapons Convention
Meetings of States Parties
Geneva
4 December 2019**

Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I speak to you on behalf of 45 individuals and institutions.

The global norm against biological weapons is a foundational element of international peace and security. Recognising the importance of universality of our Convention, we warmly welcome Tanzania's ratification of the BWC in August this year, and the continued efforts by the Chair, individual States Parties and civil society colleagues to achieve universalisation. National implementation of the Convention and supporting review conference recommendations remains crucial to sustaining the norm against biological weapons, and we encourage all States Parties to continue in their efforts to strengthen their national implementing measures.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the adoption, without a vote, of the BWC Resolution in the UN General Assembly First Committee. Unlike the Resolution on the Chemical Weapons Convention, where several highly politicised elements have hampered consensus, the BWC resolution continues to achieve unanimous support, reflecting the international community's continued support for the norm against biological weapons and support for the Convention. Yet, there are some States Parties that take away valuable time from BWC meetings, for example, by making highly political statements that would be more appropriately addressed in other forums, by making accusations of misconduct without providing evidence, or by using procedural declarations to derail good faith progress on the aims of the Convention. We encourage all States Parties to keep the meetings focused on the tasks at hand, and to work together to advance the objectives of the BWC.

We also welcome the growing interest in the topic of 'gender and disarmament' within the BWC community. We are pleased that the BWC Resolution in First Committee includes gender language for the first time—encouraging the equitable participation of women and men. This is important. As is the recognition of gendered impacts of biological weapons. A more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war and violence is also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict. We encourage delegates to investigate how persisting gender stereotypes pose obstacles to non-proliferation and disarmament.

Mr Chair,

The Meetings of Experts convened this past summer saw very constructive and substantive discussions. Delegations were very willing to engage in interactive discussion and debate, as

they had done at the 2018 Meetings of Experts. Hence it was highly regrettable that these discussions were not reflected in a substantial outcome document from last year's MSP. This unfortunate outcome is not reflective of the considerable preparations and substantial discussions that took place, nor of the wishes of the vast majority of States Parties. We strongly urge all States Parties to consider ways to ensure a substantive document is agreed at this meeting. Looking ahead to the 2021 Review Conference, we urge all States Parties to agree to provide inter-sessional meetings with the authority to take substantive decisions without having to wait for the five-year cycle of review conferences.

Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology capabilities have long challenged the BWC. The civil society community has considerable technical knowledge and expertise regarding emerging S&T capabilities, and we stand ready to support all efforts to strengthen the BWC, including assisting States Parties in identifying and leveraging emerging technologies and mitigating potential associated risks.¹ These efforts include oversight and governance mechanisms, codes of conduct, active learning systems to engage scientists in their development of risk assessments and the responsible use of science, and formal positions within or in support of the ISU, such as a Scientific Advisory Mechanism or S&T Officer. We recognise States Parties' dedicated efforts in reviewing S&T and encourage continued discussions, including during the 2022-25 inter-sessional meetings, to better identify and understand emerging technologies and implementation mechanisms that will allow the BWC to adapt and evolve to address future capabilities and threats.

As we noted in our statement last year, and we are concerned that we will need to say again next year, there is still no agreement on how to operationalise Article VII. We are encouraged, however, by the interest amongst States Parties in Article VII, as well as the meetings, exercises and workshops that have taken place over the past year here in Geneva and around the world, that have focused on responses to, and investigations into, potential deliberate events. We strongly encourage States Parties to continue to strive towards operationalizing Article VII. The civil society community remains committed to supporting States Parties in these efforts. To that end, we are pleased to announce that for the first year, civil society is providing a catalogue of activities in support of Article X and States Parties to the BWC, which we hope to be integrated into the Article X database.

Mr Chair,

The financial situation of the BWC remains critical. We welcome the measures endorsed at last year's MSP 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 gratefully acknowledge and congratulate the contributing States Parties for their leadership. However, the financial situation remains precarious, compromising the progress of work and the credibility of the Convention. We urge States Parties to continue their efforts to secure the financial predictability and sustainability of future BWC meetings and of the ISU.

¹ Tatyana Novosiolova, Simon Whitby, Malcolm Dando, and Graham Pearson, *Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: The Vital Importance of a Web of Prevention for Effective Biosafety and Biosecurity in the 21st Century*, Briefing Paper for BTWC Meeting of the States Parties 3-6 December 2019, November 2019

Finally, Mr Chair, we welcome your recognition that the voices, perspectives and experiences of civil society provide important contributions to BWC discussions. Civil society has played an increasingly important role in recent years in efforts to strengthen the Convention. We strongly encourage all States Parties to continue to support, and engage closely with, civil society to achieve this mutually sought goal.

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