

Joint NGO Statements to Biological Weapons Convention
Meeting of Experts 1: Cooperation and Assistance
Geneva
29 July 2019

Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the NGO community to make a statement today. We welcome your recognition that our voices, perspectives and experiences provide important contributions to BWC discussions.

I deliver the following statement on behalf of over 50 individuals and institutions.

Mr Chair,

In her reflections on last year's MX1, the Chair, Ambassador Almojuela of the Philippines, suggested several concrete proposals for further consideration at today's meeting. These included:

- An action plan for Article X implementation;
- Guidelines on Article X reports;
- The creation of a BWC Cooperation and Assistance Officer position within the ISU; and
- An open-ended working group to monitor, coordinate and review activities of cooperation and assistance.

These are all proposals that the NGO community strongly endorses, and which were also set out in our Position Paper last year. Ambassador Almojuela also proposed to further collaboration with INTERPOL, OIE and WHO; we would also wish to draw attention to the importance of further collaboration with non-governmental entities. We would also urge States Parties to facilitate regional S&T dialogues that are focused on regional BWC-related interests and problems, and that draw in regional and international expertise to share information and stimulate collaboration and cooperation.

Ambassador Almojuela's reflections and proposals for possible outcomes was a helpful addition to the meeting documentation. As were the reflections and proposals of the other MX Chairs. We encourage continuation of this initiative. In our view, the initiative was particularly valuable, alongside the report of the meeting, since no consensus could be reached at the MSP on any outcomes of the Meetings of Experts.

Mr Chair,

We find this lack of outcome highly regrettable. It is unreflective of the considerable preparations and substantial discussions that had gone into the 2018 BWC meetings by a range of actors, as well as the concerted efforts of the vast majority of States Parties

negotiating the final report to get more of the substance reflected in the report. The minimal outcome exemplifies the frustration that often comes with consensus-driven processes and raises the larger question of whether current working practices are the best way of ensuring the object and purpose of the BWC—including to ensure that biological weapons are not developed.

Trying to establish consensus consumes a great deal of meeting time that could be better spent, for instance, discussing advances in science and technology, or compliance assessment and confidence-building. Consensus brings in political battles from other areas and shifts the focus away from the core purpose of the treaty. In many ways, consensus has become less a tool for encouraging creative compromise, and more an instrument for demanding unanimity, usually resulting in lowest common denominator outcomes, as was clearly the case for the 2018 MSP report.

One small, but still significant, way to deal with consensus would be to develop a different kind of meeting report, in which consensus recommendations and proposals are prominently noted but those which do not achieve consensus are also clearly stated and acknowledged. We urge you to consider this option.

A final note, Mr Chair:

One of the characteristics of the BWC community is the commitment and dedication of its experts, and the strength of the personal relationships that build up over many years of working together. Earlier this year, we lost one of our number, when Rafael Pérez Mellado, known to most of us simply as Rafa, sadly passed away. We mourn this loss and extend our condolences to the Spanish delegation, and to his family.

With this, Mr Chair, we thank you for your attention and wish you a productive meeting.