
Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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English only

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Australia's National Statement to the 2023 BWC Meeting of States Parties

Submitted by Australia

Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Ambassador Cristina Espinoza Canizares, on assuming the role of Chair of the 2023 Meeting of States Parties (MSP). We assure you of our full support.

The Biological Weapons Convention is a vital pillar of the global disarmament and non-proliferation framework. Much has changed in biosecurity and biotechnology landscape since the Convention was first adopted but the prohibitions in the BWC remain as vital as ever.

We join others in extending a warm welcome to South Sudan as the newest State Party to the BWC. Australia encourages the remaining twelve States to follow suit and join the Convention so that we can achieve full universality of this Convention.

The establishment of the Working Group on Strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention represents a vital opportunity to strengthen and institutionalise the Convention and promote tangible action to counter the biological weapons threat. I extend my delegation's gratitude to Ambassador Damico of Brazil for the skilful way in which he has guided the Working Group during the first year of its work.

Creating a BWC Science and Technology Review Mechanism and an International Cooperation and Assistance Mechanisms are critical goals for my delegation - and they are within reach. We are fully committed to the goal of achieving an 'early harvest' in the Working Group and seeing these to mechanisms established and operational by 2025, coinciding with the centenary anniversary of the Geneva Protocol.

The Working Group also presents a critical opportunity to define what verification of the BWC looks like in the twenty-first century. Australia wants to see the development of a layered approach to verification, using measures that are implementable, sustainable and effective. An effective verification regime must respond to the biosecurity and biotechnology landscape as it now exists and not as it existed two or three decades ago. While there are useful lessons to be drawn from verification regimes existing under disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, a verification regime for the BWC must necessarily be tailored to the particular challenges posed by biological weapons.

Australia advocates a step-by-step approach to the creation of a BWC implementing organisation. This will be a long-term undertaking but there are interim steps we can take towards this goal, such as expanding the Implementation Support Unit and establishing it as a permanent technical secretariat.

Australia thanks the Implementation Support Unit for the valuable support it provides to Member States. Full and effective national implementation is crucial to strengthening the



BWC. Australia is therefore pleased to be serving as Friend of the Chair for this topic, alongside colleagues from Indonesia, Panama, Thailand and Uganda.

As well as strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention, we must preserve the integrity and independence of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism. We firmly oppose proposals for the unjustified expansion of the UN Security Council's mandate which would interfere in the UN Secretary-General's direction of the mechanism.

Australia condemns Russia's continued efforts to malign legitimate international cooperation and assistance activities, undertaken pursuant to Article X of the BWC. Russia's false narratives are a desperate attempt to justify its illegal and immoral war of aggression against Ukraine, and these falsehoods must cease.

We are also gravely concerned by Russia's attempts to block international organisations, regional intergovernmental organisations and NGOs from participating in BWC Meetings in accordance with established practices formed over three-decades. These efforts to prevent participation undermine the principles of inclusivity, transparency and openness that have long played an important role in our work. It cannot be allowed to stand that one country can silence those delegations whose views it deems inconvenient or with which it disagrees. Inclusive participation undeniably benefits our discussions by contributing to a comprehensive understanding of complex issues and ensuring informed debate.

I conclude by re-affirming Australia's commitment to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control work in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, including through promoting the full, equal, and meaningful participation of all genders in our work.

Thank you.
