



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations
Geneva**

**Statement by Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Permanent Representative of Pakistan at
Organizational Session of Working Group on Strengthening of the Convention,
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)
15 March 2023**

Madam Vice Chair,

I congratulate you and Ambassador Flavio Damico on election as Vice Chair and Chair, respectively, of this Working Group.

We appreciate the outreach before this organizational meeting and assure you of our constructive engagement.

Madam Vice Chair,

The setting up of this Working Group by the BWC States Parties at the 9th Review Conference was in many ways a system reset for the Convention after almost two decades.

The convening of this Working Group also presents a unique opportunity to revitalize the Convention, tap its full potential and to contemporize it in view of new risks as well as opportunities.

The task at hand for this organizational session, therefore, is of vital importance. It must set up the appropriate guardrails, enable full operationalization of the decision of last December and ensure that the Working Group has adequate tools at its disposal to deliver effectively on its mandate.

In this regard, in our view, six elements would be central.

First, it is no secret that the BWC regime has had its share of disagreements, keeping it in a state of virtual limbo for almost two decades. It is also obvious that the Convention has and continues to operate in an environment of reduced trust among States

Parties. This not only makes the decision to try and effectuate a reset important but also entails the responsibility to avoid exacerbating the situation of reduced trust. Therefore, it would be essential to restore and build confidence and trust among the States Parties, in the months and years ahead.

Second, it would be crucial to preserve the integrity of the decision of the Review Conference in its letter and spirit. The discussions at the Review Conference revealed diverse perspectives among States parties on how the Working Group should organize its work. Importantly, the States Parties found a consensual compromise to set up the Group to replace the previous practice of Meetings of Experts and also reduce duration of the annual Meeting of State Parties, until the 10th BWC Review Conference.

At the same time, the States Parties encouraged the Working Group to try and finish its work at an earlier date, preferably by 2025. It is important to note that this advice is precisely that, a recommendation to try and conclude work early, but not an obligation.

While timelines and timetables are helpful tools, it may be prudent not to dwell too much on these discussions. We consider making meaningful progress on substance as the fundamental task of this Group. If States parties are able to fulfill the mandate at a time earlier than 2027, it would be welcome. However, we must steer clear of any arbitrary deadlines or approaches. In our view, reopening or renegotiating the compromise reached at the Review Conference would be unhelpful.

Third, as explicitly outlined in its mandate, this Group was set up to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention in all its aspects. This purpose is to be achieved through specific effective measures and recommendations. If past twenty years at BWC are any guide, this task would require significant efforts, patience and flexibility on the part of all states. We hold high hopes that all State parties will do their part. The experience of past two decades also highlights that this endeavor will also require considerable investment in time on the part of everyone. Fortunately, the Review Conference has provided us this in the form of up to sixty days of meetings for the Working Group. We must be prepared to fully utilize this time allocation and if we reach an earlier agreement and deliver on all aspects of the mandate, it would be certainly a bonus.

Fourth, the Review Conference made this Working Group a replacement for the MXs and the centerpiece of the intersessional work program. It is embodied in three key differences from MXs, namely: one, a focus on specific and effective measures on each of the topics and on all aspects of the Convention; two, recognition of the organic nature of the complete work by the working group, rather than in virtual silos; and three, a consensus report containing recommendations, rather than non-negotiated descriptive summaries. These aspects must be kept central in setting up the organizational framework and to guide the substantive work and outcomes we strive for.

My **fifth point** is regarding sequencing. The seven agreed topics present their own unique aspects. While an organic link remains between all topics, it is also evident that certain topics are more focused due to their own content while others have deeper links with each other. It is therefore, only natural and logical that a meaningful conversation on certain topics will require prior discussion on some or all the other topics. At the same time, one topic i.e. topic G in the Review Conference decision, will require discussions in conjunction with each of the other six topics.

In light of these considerations and to enable effective fulfillment of the mandate given to the Group by the Review Conference, we would propose the following.

- We must allocate time at each session to examine topic G so as to ensure that the relevant organizational, institutional and financial aspects are adequately catered for with regard to consensus measures agreed for any and all topics under consideration.
- Moreover, to have a coherent and effective approach, Compliance and Verification should be taken up by the Group after agreement on all other measures has been achieved. This would be natural and logical, so as to enable the States parties to come up with adequate compliance and verification measures, in response to what is required under each of the topics.
- In terms of sequencing, the other topics can be taken up in the form of pairs, devoting at least one week per topic during each of the summer sessions to begin with. If progress is slow, more time can be allocated. If there is early agreement on specific measures, other topics can be moved up.
- Each December session should also have a provision, perhaps two to three days, for the States parties to agree on “interim recommendations and conclusions” by consensus. This would not only maintain a tangible link between the multiyear work of the Group, it would also be an invaluable contribution to the final report, which can incorporate these interim recommendations and conclusion appropriately.
- Critically, this would build the necessary confidence within this Convention through demonstration of interim outcomes, by consensus. It would also serve as a litmus test to objectively gauge if indeed the Working Group is in a position to try and conclude its work before the mandated duration.

Madam Vice Chair,

My **last point** is regarding the States Parties driven nature of this Convention and indeed this Working Group. As I had pointed out during the Review Conference last December, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is at an inflection point. The Review Conference took the first necessary step in providing all states with an opportunity and a platform to chart a new pathway to progress in the form of this Group.

It is a refreshing prospect for each State party to contribute to this effort aimed at revitalizing, fully operationalizing and contemporizing the Convention and make it fit for

purpose. We are fully committed to playing our part with a constructive approach. We trust each State party will do its utmost likewise. We would therefore, encourage the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Working Group Bureau to hold extensive consultations with all States parties, including during the intersessional parts so as to invigorate this States driven process.

We also assure you and the Chair of our support in steering and enabling the Working Group to ensure that this opportunity is fully realized, in the interest of all States Parties.

I thank you.