

## General Statement by the Kingdom of Belgium

### Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

*Statement delivered by H.E. Ambassador Geert Muylle (34<sup>st</sup> speaker on the list)*

Mr. President,

Let me first congratulate you, Ambassador, on your election as President of the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

Let me also thank the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) for their extensive work in the preparation of this Conference and, in particular, for the regional information workshops they conducted (with the support of the European Union) to facilitate consensus-building on the strengthening of the Convention.

Belgium aligns itself with the Statement that will be delivered by the European Union. It reiterates its support to the EU common position laid down in Council decision 2015/2096 and would like to make a number of comments in its national capacity.

Mr. President,

Belgium strongly supports the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) as the cornerstone of international efforts to prevent biological agents or toxins from being developed, produced or otherwise acquired and used as weapons. The BTWC is a crucial element of our collective security and one of the key instruments of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation.

My country therefore welcomes the progress made towards **universalization** since the Meeting of State Parties in 2015 and supports the adoption of an action plan on universalization coordinated by the ISU.

Mr. President,

Belgium wishes to stress that, in the framework of our Convention, both the question of a permanent **Science and Technology review** as well as that of risk assessment and risk management remain central issues to be addressed. Belgium looks forward to substantiated and focused exchanges on evolutions in science and technology in the field of life science. We support in this respect the strengthening of a collective review process, that should be both technical in nature and geographically representative.

**Enhancing transparency** and building confidence in compliance is another important issue. I would like to refer in this respect to the Working Paper on “*Building confidence through voluntary transparency exercises*” that will be circulated shortly on a behalf of a group of 13 countries having engaged in such voluntary transparency exercises.

Drawing from its experience in the framework of the Benelux peer review exercise presented at the MSP 2015 through its Benelux Working Paper, Belgium favors a **voluntary peer review process** based on the existing CBMs exercises. It is not in favor of a new reporting system that would require extra investments from States Parties.

Such voluntary peer review processes do not only strengthen common understanding on CBMs and implementation, they also contribute to reinforcing capabilities of States Parties in the field of implementation and reporting.

Centering the peer review exercises on existing CBMs favors their reproducibility and paves the way to a standardized compatibility between different peer review exercises.

Mr. President,

In line with the final document of the 7<sup>th</sup> Review Conference and, in particular, the discussion on Art. IV, Belgium remains convinced of the importance of implementing voluntary **management standards on biosafety and biosecurity**, of encouraging **the promotion of a culture of responsibility** amongst relevant national professionals and of the voluntary development, adoption and promulgation of codes of conduct. Belgium would also like to stress the importance of raising awareness amongst live science **students and researchers on biosafety and biosecurity**.

Mr. President,

Concerning the **future inter-sessional program**, Belgium is open to organizational proposals which take into account the role and structure of the ISU and the current financial constraints. These proposals should be aimed at strengthening the professional community around the BTWC and develop convergence amongst provisions of the Convention as for example the CBMs and the Science and Technology review.

On a separate track, Belgium continues to pursue its efforts aimed at **amending the Rome Statute** of the International Criminal Court with a view to include the use of biological weapons as a war crime.

To conclude, Mr. President,

Belgium is looking forward to successful deliberations and assures you of its full cooperation and support.

Thank you Mr. President.