Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Ninth Review Conference

29 November 2022

General Debate

National Statement of Ireland
Thank you President,

First, I want to start by wishing you every success and to thank you, your team, the Bureau and the ISU for the extensive work you have undertaken in preparation for this meeting. Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and the Global Partnership, and adds the following remarks in a national capacity.

President,

The BWC was the first multilaterally-negotiated Treaty to prohibit a full category of WMD. Regrettably, the treaty is still not universal. We call on all States outside the Convention to ratify it as a matter of priority, in order to strengthen the global community’s efforts to achieve a world free from these illegal and abhorrent weapons.

There can be no doubt of the urgency of our work. Developments since the last Review Conference, in particular Covid-19, have clearly shown that biological threats will not discriminate amongst victims in our interconnected world. Our efforts must be truly global and cooperative to ensure effective disease monitoring, detection, control and prevention.

At this Review Conference, it is essential that we operationalise our ambitions – ensuring that proposals and working papers translate into specific and substantive actions. The pandemic starkly illustrated the need to strengthen biosecurity and biosafety at the local, regional, and international levels.

President,
Establishing concrete objectives is a key step. To this end, Ireland is pleased to co-sponsor the proposal to establish an inclusive Temporary Experts Working Group during the intersessional period, which will evaluate and report on concrete measures to strengthen the Convention. The proposed Working Group’s focus on verification, bio-risk management, and Science and Technology review are top priorities.

Advances in the biological sciences and biotechnology today are occurring at an accelerated and unprecedented pace. We need look no further than the development of Covid-19 vaccines, achieved in record time, in order to realise the speed of advancement.

However, with these new advancements, so too come new risks. We must ensure the Convention remains responsive in order to keep pace with these developments. It is clear that the establishment of a Science and Technology review mechanism enjoys broad support and we should now set our minds on the specific characteristics of such a mechanism.

We are further pleased to co-sponsor the Belgian-led working paper on bio-risk management standards. Such standards are a valuable means of facilitating national implementation of the BWC. In addition, voluntary Codes of Conduct can also play an important role in encouraging compliance with the object and purpose of the BWC and Ireland recognises the concrete contributions of China and Pakistan towards achieving better biosafety and biosecurity.

With respect to the issue of verification, my delegation believes agreement on additional legal and voluntary measures would strengthen the Convention. Robust verification mechanisms improve confidence in, and the functioning of, disarmament and non-proliferation instruments and we look forward to a constructive and ambitious discussion on this issue during the review conference.
While not substitutes for a verification mechanism, Ireland also emphasises the roles of the BWC’s Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as valuable means of enhancing trust between States Parties and facilitating transparency.

President,

Our ambitions for this Review Conference must be matched by agreement on additional resources. Payment by States Parties of their annual assessed contributions, in full and on time, is the only way to guarantee the sustainability of the BWC. Ireland continues to support the strengthening of the Implementation Support Unit and the inclusion of further activities in its crucial mandate, such as a standing science and technology advisory and liaison function, and a stronger role in facilitating the crucial cooperation under Article X.

President,

Ireland is committed to ensuring the integration of gender perspectives in the work of the Convention. Regrettably, the BWC is still far from reaching equality in terms of participation. The evidence is clear that diverse participation and the full, meaningful, and equal participation by women would benefit the Convention.

In conclusion, Ireland regrets Russia's actions to politicise the Convention through baseless allegations against Ukraine and the United States. The now-concluded consultations under Article V demonstrated in a detailed and exhaustive manner that those claims are entirely unfounded. We are also concerned that the misuse of the convention in this manner could negatively impact legitimate cooperation envisaged under Article X. My delegation hopes that this Review Conference can now turn its attention to the important matters in our agenda. We look forward to working together with all States Parties,
international organisations, civil society, academia, and industry, to ensure that the outcome results in a strengthened and more effective Convention.

Thank you.