



S L O V A K I A

Statement

by

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at the 9th BTWC Review Conference

General Debate

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Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as the President of the 9th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. You can count on full support of the Slovak delegation.

Slovakia aligns itself with the EU statement and I would like to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

The full statement will be published online.

Mr. President,

The Biological Weapons Convention is the key pillar of disarmament and non-proliferation efforts and the fundamental instrument to counter the threats of acquisition and use of biological and toxin weapons by States and non-State actors.

Biological risks and vulnerabilities received high attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted that international cooperation and assistance is crucial to deal with risks of spread of dangerous pathogens, and that resilient and prepared national capacities are fundamental to cope with them.

In Slovakia, we have dedicated Information Centre for Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons, which is specifically responsible for implementing the Convention and relevant public health measures. This institution is a unit within the Regional Health Authority Banská Bystrica, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Health.

The Centre is strengthening national capacities by steadily improving its detection and diagnostics. The determined work of this Centre led in 2016 to the successful detection of a toxin-producing strain of *Clostridium botulinum* subtype A3. This bacterial strain, discovered during an epidemiological investigation from a commercially produced chickpea spread, was named after Banská Bystrica, the town, where the Centre is located. During the past two decades, the Centre has been conducting a microbiological analysis of postal mails suspected of containing anthrax and examined more than 1000 samples for the presence of this high-risk pathogen.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre has significantly strengthened its laboratory capacities as well. Its staff performed molecular diagnostics of COVID-19, including sequencing analysis of the viral ribonucleic acid. The Centre also performed diagnostic services for the presence of COVID-19 for public health purposes. Moreover, the Centre's scientific potential developed within the BWC context for evaluating and responding to the outbreaks of infectious diseases, was considerably involved in analysing epidemiologic data and proposing epidemic control measures. Thanks to this scientific potential,

epidemiological predictions have been available to decision-makers already in the early stages of the pandemic and could be utilised to formulate reasonable, justified, and data-driven proposals of national measures to control the pandemic.

Slovakia was also actively involved in international scientific projects relevant to the goal and purpose of the Convention. One such example is the "European program for the establishment of validated procedures for detecting and identifying biological toxins", in short EuroBioTox project, coordinated by the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin (Germany), aimed at enhancing capacities to diagnose selected toxins, create a network of laboratories capable of analyzing them, and thus help combat bioterrorism. These toxins include botulinum toxins, ricin, abrin, and staphylococcal enterotoxins. Slovakia was one of 23 countries participating in this project and the Regional Health Authority Banská Bystrica has been a member of the outer circle of laboratories in this project since June 2017.

Mr. President,

Slovakia is fully committed to contributing to the success of the Review Conference. We should strive to reaffirm the global legally binding norm against biological weapons, further strengthen the Convention and thoroughly review and enhance its implementation.

We attach high importance to the universalization of the BWC. It is essential to reach out to those states that have not yet legally committed themselves to the Convention and its obligations. We also welcome six new State Parties that joined the Convention since the last Review Conference.

During the last review cycle and the intersessional program, State Parties submitted impressive amount of substantive working documents and constructive proposals. It clearly demonstrates the interest and will to strengthen the Convention. We need to build our efforts on this bulk of work.

Review Conference should adopt forward-looking decisions and recommendations, which would allow for future productive intersessional work. In this regard, Slovakia supports proposal to establish an Experts Working Group as elaborated in the working paper submitted by Canada and the Netherlands jointly with other states.

Moreover, rapid science and technological developments relevant to the BWC need to be addressed appropriately through the strengthened process within the Convention. Its establishment is urgent and necessary to keep pace with advancements in biological sciences. As an element in this process, we are in favour of adoption of a voluntary code of conduct for scientists and other relevant personnel.

Slovakia also supports the operationalisation of Article VII. The establishment of a database to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII, as proposed

by France and India, which would allow matching of specific offers with requests for assistance, would be a step in the right direction.

We are also in favour of further strengthening the implementation of Article X. Particularly we support the proposal made by France, Senegal and Togo to establish an online platform dedicated to biosafety and biosecurity under Article X.

We also believe that we need to move forward and enable more agile and responsive decision-making within the Convention. We support delegating certain decision-making powers to the Meeting of States Parties.

Slovakia also attaches high importance to the confidence-building measures as a means to increase transparency. Slovakia also supports other tools to foster transparency, including cooperation among State Parties, such as peer-review exercises. We believe, these tangible approaches add value and enhance the regime of the Convention.

Slovakia supports the strengthening of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and the prolongation of its mandate. We are also in favour the ISU to engage in additional duties, particularly with regard to science and technology developments. However, it would be hard to request more responsibility and workload without sufficient ISU staff. Hence, we support the establishment of a science and technology officer position within the ISU.

For the effective operation of the Convention as well as sustaining of the ISU, it is necessary that State Parties comply with their financial obligations and pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. We call on States Parties in arrears to pay their contributions without further delay.

Mr. President,

This Review Conference is taking place in the situation of illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which Slovakia condemns in the strongest possible terms. Actions of Russian forces cause unspeakable suffering to civilians. We are appalled by the large-scale military attacks on the Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure. Russian Federation actions in Ukraine are blatant violation of international law, UN Charter and the international humanitarian law. Slovakia stands with Ukraine and supports its territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

Russian invasion has been accompanied by the disinformation campaign, which has also bearing upon this Convention. We consider Russian allegations about development of biological weapons in Ukraine as unsubstantiated and unfounded. The processes based on Article V. and VI. demonstrated this quite clearly. From our perspective, there are no outstanding issues left on this matter.

Mr. President,

It is the responsibility of the State Parties of this Convention to work constructively and in good faith to achieve substantive outcome of the Conference. My delegation stands ready to contribute.

Thank you for your attention.