

**Statement as delivered by Bonnie Jenkins,
United States Under Secretary of State
for Arms Control and International Security**

**Ninth Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference
Geneva, Switzerland | November 29, 2022**

Mr. President,

Distinguished colleagues,

We meet in challenging times. Last year, I called COVID-19 a wake-up call for humanity. It still is. It showed us what is at stake and why we must act in the BWC and elsewhere to address biological threats, whether natural, accidental, or intentional.

Since then, new challenges have emerged. Some may ask if it is possible for us to reach agreement on anything under the present circumstances.

I believe it is. It will take hard work, patience, and compromise. Above all, it will require us to heed that wake-up call and respond. Disease knows no boundaries and effective response requires international cooperation. My delegation has come here to work constructively, and I pledge our full support for your efforts, Mr. President, over the next three weeks.

There are proposals that are ripe for action at this Review Conference – proposals that can be adopted now, with real, near-term benefits for States Parties:

- First, progress has been made in reconciling different approaches to a review mechanism for science and technology. We can and we should establish such a mechanism at this Conference.
- Second, proposals by South Africa, France, and India provide practical tools for States Parties seeking assistance under Article VII if they are harmed by a violation of the Convention. We should address any remaining questions about these proposals and adopt them.
- Third, rapid advances in biotechnology and increasing numbers of laboratories working with high-consequence pathogens offer important benefits, but they are not without risks. We should collaboratively strengthen biosafety and biosecurity around the world.

- Fourth, many States Parties have called for the establishment of a voluntary fund for technical cooperation. We agree. President Biden's budget request for fiscal year 2023 includes five million dollars for the first year of voluntary support to the BWC. I call on States Parties to establish such a fund.
- And finally, we should seek to clarify the role and authority of annual meetings. Proposals like those I have just described will require ongoing management to be effective, which may require decisions on next steps. We must be able to act more than twice a decade. This can be done in a way that respects the special authority associated with Review Conferences.

Mr. President,

There are also harder issues before us; issues that will take more time and effort to address. How do we strengthen implementation of the Convention and enhance mutual assurance of compliance? These are not simple questions. Approaches from over twenty years ago are unlikely to work today. We need to examine how technology has changed and what the bioweapons threats of today and tomorrow looks like. We also need to explore what measures – yes, including possible verification measures – might be effective in today's context.

We therefore support the proposal made by Canada, the Netherlands, and the 27 cosponsors to create an expert working group to study these issues and recommend next steps. Such an approach could take us beyond the intersessional process we have followed and pave the way for important progress.

Individually, these proposals are modest. Together, they reflect a commitment to revitalize this forum. By showing that we can work together to get things done, these proposals build trust and set the BWC on a new path. We must recognize, however, that these steps will require new resources for additional meeting time and additional personnel. Yes, national budgets are tight. But the BWC is one of the smallest and — dare I say — cheapest, of all multilateral efforts, with a staff of just three, and only twelve days of meeting time each year. We simply cannot get more out of this forum without putting more in.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues,

This may be a challenging time, but it is also a tremendous opportunity. Let us focus on that opportunity and work together to move forward.

Thank you.