

Statement from the Harvard Sussex Program on Chemical and Biological Weapons to the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction.

Mr President, Distinguished Representatives:

The Harvard Sussex Program on Chemical and Biological Weapons (HSP) greatly appreciates the opportunity to offer this statement.

Over the past 20 years, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has been exposed to shocks from the external geopolitical environment. However, as none of the 165 States Parties to the BWC has withdrawn its membership, it can be assumed that each member continues to believe that the benefits they enjoy as being party to this treaty outweigh any negative obligations and costs. In order for this evaluation to continue, we believe that there are a number of activities that are required, and today we will concentrate on one area we feel that States Parties should agree: to increase their efforts to stay informed about trends in the life sciences and related areas of technology.

Understanding the implications of new developments in the life sciences and related areas of technology is an essential task for States Parties. The prevention of the development, acquisition and use of biological and toxin weapons, requires a thorough understanding of the nature of disease and of the properties of the biological agents and toxins that cause it. New discoveries or utilities in the life sciences and related technologies, in a changing geostrategic context, may therefore alter the assumptions that underlie provisions of the treaty and affect the scope of the norm against bioweapons acquisition and use, or the way the BWC's requirements are applied in practice.

The current process by which States Parties take into account any new developments in science and technology is tied to Article XII. However, since at least 1979, States Parties have been making statements alluding to the need to elaborate, update or reform the process by which science and technology is considered.

One of the primary reasons given for supporting more frequent attention to science and technology is the pace at which science and technology is advancing and its increased global distribution. These advances have implications for defence as well as offence. Advances are occurring because of the integration of powerful technologies and new concepts and methods from other scientific areas such as the physical sciences, mathematics, computational sciences, and engineering. Advances are also occurring in science relating to protection and to attribution, as well as through new utilities of established technologies. These advances have both positive and negative potentialities for the operation of a range of Articles of the Convention, not only Article I. Although ensuring that the scope of the Convention remains all encompassing is important, we believe that consideration of science and technology potentially relevant for the Convention should be explored using a holistic framework.

As a group which studies issues relating to both chemical and biological weapons, we note, in particular, the continued convergence between the life sciences and chemistry and the implications that this is having for both the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention. We are fully supportive of the suggestions made by the Advisory Panel on Future OPCW Priorities that "exchanges of experience and joint technical reviews could be helpful to understand how [convergence] affects the implementation of [the Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention] at the interface

between chemistry and biology” and that the “Technical Secretariat should establish a liaison (e.g., a point of contact) with the BWC implementation process”. We hope that the States Parties to the BWC will give these suggestions due consideration during their discussions and, as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is doing, examine what the convergence of chemistry and biology means in practical terms for their work.

Mr President,

In preparing for this Review Conference several states parties have put forward developed opinions on how they view future State Party consideration of new developments in science and technology. These papers converge around the ideas of annual consideration and the establishment of some form of group structure.

We support the idea of more frequent examination, and have over the past two years conducted a careful study of future options which States Parties may wish to consider. Some of the key findings from this project will be presented at our side event on Wednesday morning beginning at 9am in Room XXIV.

We believe that any group formed should be open to participation by all State Parties. However, because the very advances in science and technology which are spurring States Parties towards considering increasing the frequency of reviews also bring increased scientific complexity, we believe that some form of engagement with members of the scientific and industrial communities will be necessary.

Mr President, Distinguished Representatives:

The Harvard Sussex Program has been a long standing supporter of the Biological Weapons Convention. We remain so, and stand ready to assist you in strengthening the Convention.

We thank you for your attention.

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