



The International Council for the Life Sciences

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Statement of the International Council for the Life Sciences To the 7th Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference

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Thank you, Mr President, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen for this opportunity to address you today on behalf of the International Council for the Life Sciences (ICLS).

The mission of the ICLS is to help promote and advance global public health, safety and security. To this end, we seek to safeguard opportunities to conduct research and apply advances in the life sciences for the practical benefit of society by promoting best practices, standards and codes of conduct, so ensuring the responsible pursuit of science. In other words, we seek to address the risks that may arise from research and its exploitation before they impede scientific progress and society's ability to benefit from them.

We believe that this is a task which is best conducted by both governments and civic society, preferably in concert, and that informal networks of concerned and motivated individuals can contribute disproportionately and extremely cost efficiently to the achievement of these shared goals. Indeed, there will always be limitations on what governments can achieve on their own. This is where civic society, and networks, can pick up. To that end, the ICLS is very active in building networks to address the most pressing problems facing the life sciences.

Networks can be effective in mitigating biological risks where there is a convergence of interests because they can:

- provide access to expertise and reference data that would otherwise not be available
- be very cost efficient by being virtual and thereby removing overhead costs
- respond directly to local challenges

- operate very quickly to address queries or solve problems
- promote mutual learning and so encourage participation in the network
- focus on both local and global issues, thereby providing points of engagement for a wider pool of potential participants and connecting them and their concerns
- be open to all who want to join
- empower individuals, because through them individuals can make a difference
- be sustainable at multiple resource levels, adapting structure and activities to the resources available
- allow people to work together as a team who otherwise would not be able to do so because of political, cultural or social divides, and
- as a result of their distributed nature:
 - be adaptive to new tasks or challenges
 - multi-task, being different things to different people
 - be resilient, surviving the loss of one or more people or groups.

There are particular areas where civic networks may be able to act more effectively than governments:

- where collaboration is needed, for example addressing:
 - multi-disciplinary issues;
 - issues which require regional or international coordination and cooperation;
- rapidly changing environments (eg new technologies);
- issues where normal structures have failed or reached their limits, e.g where:
 - political tension makes formal inter-state cooperation impossible;
 - governmental infrastructure has failed due to civil war, natural disasters or failed states;
 - the intent is to go beyond regulation and enforcement into culture change, eg changing the scientific community's security culture;
 - the cost or burden to formal structures is too high (eg it would be prohibitive for a government agency to constantly monitor the research activities of every scientist);
 - informal structures can perform the task better, eg peer review of research proposals;

- where speed of action over distance is vital, for example:
 - infectious disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis;
 - data sharing and dissemination.

Furthermore, the process of building civic networks to assist in the achievement of societal goals can have very substantial secondary benefits, including:

- the empowerment of individuals and institutions;
- building bridges across political and social divides;
- strengthening civic society and individual involvement in civic duty; and
- enhancing the resilience of society because of the distributed nature of the networks.

ICLS is currently active in building and growing three substantial, locally-led networks with direct connection to the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention:

1. As you will see from the Message from the 3rd Biosafety and Biosecurity International Conference, we are building and growing a network for creating national and regional biosafety and biosecurity strategies in 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. By building up the capacity of these countries to respond to major biological events, whatever their origin, we are helping to diminish and mitigate the effects, inter alia, of a BW attack, thereby diminishing the attractiveness of those weapons;
2. We helped create the Responsible Conduct of Science initiative in Pakistan. By raising the awareness of scientists of the potential misuse of their work and by spreading best practices for the ethical conduct of science, we are making it more difficult for would be malfactors to misuse biology for weapons purposes;
3. We are working with the International Association for Synthetic Biology and with the International Gene Synthesis Consortium to establish mechanisms for self-monitoring of the trade in synthetic genes so that these companies can be sure that they are not inadvertently allowing their services to be misused for weapons purposes.

Of course, creating and building networks for change requires champions and leadership. We are very happy also to be working with the Elizabeth R Griffin Research Foundation, the International

Federation of Biosafety Associations, the American Biological Safety Association and Canada's Global Partnership Program to conduct workshops on leadership in biosafety and biosecurity in the MENA region to ensure that work within the region on biosafety and biosecurity issues is self-sustaining, locally-owned and driven by local priorities and needs.

None of our work would be possible without the support of the foundations, private individuals and governments who give so generously of their time, expertise and money. We thank them for their support and are proud to be part of such a wide-ranging public-private partnership.

The ICLS considers the BWC to be one of the cornerstones of global health security. We strongly support the objectives of the Convention, wish the Review Conference utmost success, and look forward to continuing to work with the BWC towards our common objectives.