

INES statement to the Seventh Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Geneva, December 2011

Mr. President, distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege and honour to be invited to make a statement to the Seventh Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), which I am doing on behalf of the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES).

Mr. President,

As scientists and engineers, we must continue to express our concerns about the need to deal more effectively with advances in science and technology in order to minimize the potential risks that they pose to the BWC.

Advances in science and technology (S&T) over the past few years have enabled new and improved approaches to countering disease and improving health in general. At the same time these advances are generating an enormous amount of knowledge that also pinpoints new ways of manipulating vital life processes in a malign manner. The spectrum of biological agents that may be misused in that context is growing steadily. This knowledge is being accumulated with explosive rapidity and at the same time it is becoming more and more complex, so that we are running into the danger of losing sight of possible ways to deal with the risks effectively.

INES is very encouraged to see that several States Parties representing a wide global distribution, as well as professional organizations, have recognized the need for a more analytical, systematic approach to assessing the relevance of advances in science and technology for the BWC within the framework of the Convention.¹ This shows a general trend toward recognition of the value of the yearly meetings of the past two ISPs, but with the acknowledgement of the need for a new approach that should have a “more ambitious agenda” with a “more interactive” participation, and, above all, be “more results-oriented”². INES strongly supports these calls for a new annual S&T assessment mechanism within a continuing, improved yearly intersessional process.

Mr. President,

In addition, INES recognises that all life scientists have an obligation to act responsibly in their work to help minimize the associated risks. However, several studies have clearly shown that the majority of those active in the life sciences are unaware of these responsibilities under the BWC, and this shows an urgent need for dual-use ethics education programmes.

¹ Australia, Japan and New Zealand. 2011. *Proposal for the annual review of advances in science and technology relevant to the Biological Weapons Convention*. BWC/CONF.VII/WP.13. Available at <http://www.unog.ch>; India. 2011. *Proposal for structured and systematic review of science and technology developments under the Convention*. Available at <http://www.unog.ch>; South Africa. 2011. *Proposal for the intersessional process*. BWC/CONF.VII/WP.18. Available at <http://www.unog.ch>; United Kingdom. 2011. *Illustrative model intersessional work programme: a proposal for task group structure and agenda items*. BWC/CONF.VII/WP.2. Available at <http://www.unog.ch>; United States of America. 2011. *The next intersessional process*. BWC/CONF.VII/WP.23. Available at <http://www.unog.ch>; National Research Council. 2011. *Life sciences and related fields: Trends relevant to the Biological Weapons Convention: Final Report*. Available at <http://.nap.edu>; Pearson, G.S. 2011. Special HSP report from Montreux. Available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/spru/hsp>.

² United States of America. 2011, op.cit.

While a great deal of effort has been put into consideration of the promulgation of codes of conduct and development of education programmes during the past intersessional processes to remedy this situation, the actual implementation of such codes and education programmes around the world is proving to be difficult.

This is a topic that INES is very much concerned with and while we welcomed the 2006 Final Declaration urging *States Parties to promote the development of training and education programmes for those granted access to biological agents and toxins relevant to Convention*, we consider that this Seventh Review Conference should agree that the implementation of the Convention requires that effective action be taken to ensure the education and awareness of all those engaged in the life sciences. It is our view that States Parties need to take steps nationally to ensure the education and awareness of all those engaged in the life sciences. Furthermore, States Parties should provide annual reports on the steps they have taken nationally to improve education and outreach as a part of their submissions under CBM E. These annual reports on education and outreach should be discussed and considered at the annual meetings in the intersessional process so that States Parties can benefit from best practice as it is developed.

Mr. President,

INES proposes that the States Parties to the Seventh Review Conference of the BWC agree to the establishment of a Working Group composed of government experts, scientists from civil society institutions and representatives of industry to carry out a structured, analytical and systematic review of S&T developments of relevance to the Convention within the framework of a new intersessional process 2012-2015. This review should include:

1. The consideration of one particular area of advancement in S&T per year, and the particular area for the first year should be agreed at this Review Conference;
2. Formulation of recommendations covering the relevance of the advances in the particular area for the whole of the BWC and what measures might best minimize the risks involved;
3. Identification of advances that could contribute positively to enhancement of biosecurity, for example through better diagnostics, prophylaxis and therapy;
4. Presentation of a report by this Working Group to the next annual Meeting of States Parties for a collective scrutiny of the results and to decide on the next particular area to be addressed.

Mr. President,

INES strongly supports the collective interest that has been shown by the States Parties to the BWC to take realistic, concrete steps at this Seventh Review Conference to make essential progress in strengthening the Convention.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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