

Norway

**Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention
Review Conference, 5 – 22 December 2011**

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Steffen Kongstad
Head of the Norwegian Delegation**

Mr President

Let me congratulate you on your election as the President of this Review Conference. I would commend you for the way you have guided us through the deliberations leading up to this Conference.

Under your leadership and with active involvement from States Parties and civil society, we have an opportunity to demonstrate the efficiency of multilateral diplomacy towards disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr President

Norway has aligned itself with the JACKSONZ-statement presented by Canada. I would, however, like to highlight a few issues of particular importance to Norway.

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is a keystone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. In addition to its inherent purpose, the convention has contributed to further multilateral arms control diplomacy, as shown in 2006 when the States Parties agreed on a pragmatic intersessional work programme focusing on selected topics. The Conference demonstrated that it was possible to put aside past differences and focus on areas where States Parties could unite in constructive ways. We should build on this positive momentum.

Biotechnology is a rapidly evolving science. We should be ambitious and seek a forward-looking approach which will help the international community to deal with the growing risk of the hostile use of biological materials due to technological development. It is crucial that we continue to consolidate the norms set out in the Convention and the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

Mr President

Let me mention some of Norway's main priorities for this Review Conference:

We need to agree upon a new intersessional programme that allows States Parties to address both existing and emerging challenges in the coming years. In that regard we should also look at how the intersessional format could possibly be improved and strengthened.

We must clearly make greater efforts to universalise the BTWC, and we hope that the upcoming Conference in Finland on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass

destruction in the Middle East will encourage more countries in the region to join the Convention.

We also need to look at how the confidence-building measures can be refined and utilized to better reflect current needs. In this regard I would refer to the German-Swiss-Norwegian proposal on the revision of existing CBMs which has been put forward for the upcoming Conference, as a part of a process to increase the universality, transparency and functionality of the Confidence Building Measures. I would also like to draw your attention to the working paper presented by Norway, Switzerland and New Zealand on how the utilization of the CBMs could possibly be improved.

In addition there is a need to take a closer look at how we can ensure that the Convention keeps pace with the rapid developments in science and technology by strengthening the practical collaboration between the scientific and disarmament communities.

Mr President

Health remains a key priority for Norwegian development cooperation. Norway therefore underlines the importance of the full implementation of article X of the BTWC. At the same time we must recognise that efforts in promoting international cooperation and assistance in human, animal and plant health are carried out by other institutions, such as the World Health Organisation, the World Organization for Animal Health and FAO. On the other hand we are convinced that article X should be used to facilitate and promote further international cooperation in life sciences. We are ready to consider a mechanism which will enable us to do more on article X, as long as it provides an added value and does not duplicate efforts in other institutions.

This brings me to my last point, namely the importance of maintaining a strong ISU for the Convention as this unit has proved a valuable tool for implementing the Convention. The ISU and its mandate need to be confirmed and, if possible, strengthened at the forthcoming Review Conference. In that regard allow me to express my gratitude to the staff at the ISU for their tireless energy and commitment.

Mr President

It is important that the BTWC community continues to enhance its partnerships with relevant actors like the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the International Organisation for Animal Health. Moreover, Norway remains convinced of the value of the involvement of the ICRC and civil society actors. Advancement in the field of disarmament and arms control can only be achieved if states listen to, learn from, and include strong voices from civil society.

Mr President

We are all aware of the regional divisions that sometimes occur during our deliberations. However, as the Review Conferences in the past have demonstrated, when countries work to find common ground, important results can be achieved. In that regard I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Indonesian Delegation for the close and fruitful cooperation we have had with Indonesia throughout the last years. By organising international conferences and seminars on the different topics of the intersessional programme of work, it has been our joint ambition to contribute to an enhanced cooperation, dialogue and the sharing of national experiences among the States Parties. The spirit of joint partnership should be the guiding principle for this Review Conference. Only through partnership can we build a robust and strong Convention for the coming years. Let me assure you that Norway will contribute to this end.

Thank you