

**Preparatory Committee for the Eighth Review Conference of the
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention**

**Geneva, 8-12 August 2016
Ireland General Statement
Delivered by Deputy Director Rosie Keane**

Thank you Mr Chairman,

Firstly, I would like to begin by wishing you every success for the week ahead and to thank you and your team for the work you have already undertaken. I also want to take this opportunity to offer you Ireland's full cooperation and support.

Ireland aligns itself fully with the Statement to be delivered by the European Union; I would like to add the following remarks in a National capacity.

As we prepare for the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, it is timely to reiterate that Ireland regards the BTWC as a critical instrument in the global community's efforts to achieve a world free from all weapons of mass destruction - chemical, biological and nuclear.

Mr Chairman,

The Review Conference provides us with an invaluable opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to the BTWC and it could not be timelier.

Developments since the last Review Conference, including the outbreak of the Ebola Virus and more recently, the Zika Virus, have shown us clearly that biological threats do not discriminate amongst victims, nor do they respect borders. Therefore, we must do all that we can, as global partners and States Parties to the BTWC, to ensure effective disease monitoring, detection, control and prevention.

Yet another compelling reason for strengthening implementation of our Convention relates to the worrying reports that some Non-State Actor groups are seeking to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction. These developments should reinforce the resolve of the global community to adhere to UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and its strong obligations on all States to prevent Non-State actors from acquiring or using weapons of mass destruction. The potential consequences of such groups obtaining these weapons should be enough to galvanise the international community to greater action. The Review of UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which is currently underway, should also provide impetus and create synergies with our work here in the BTWC on this important and urgent question.

Mr Chairman,

In the interests of ensuring a truly universal, strengthened and more effective Convention, Ireland is of the view that we need to have inclusive participation in discussions. Accordingly, we look forward to engaging with experts, NGO's and scientists, as has been the established practice at previous Review Conferences.

Further, we feel that it is important to ensure diverse representation, especially from States Parties who are often at the front-line, in terms of experiencing disease outbreaks and threats from non-state actors; their voice is absolutely crucial in these debates. To help achieve this aim, Ireland has provided sponsorship funding.

We understand that sponsorship has also been provided by our colleagues from Australia, Canada, the European Union, the Netherlands and Switzerland and we would like to express our gratitude in this regard. We were pleased to be have been able to provide funding and hope that this might be a consideration for other States Parties in advance of November's Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

In preparation for this week's meeting, we reviewed many papers submitted by State Parties, and would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation in this regard. We feel that the papers have identified areas of common ground, which we feel should be explored further in the hope that consensus can be agreed on some topics at the Review Conference.

Firstly, the current inter-sessional process is hampered somewhat by the lack of timely and effective decision-making procedures. We feel that this deficiency should be addressed as a priority, so that States Parties can mount effective and rapid responses to the ever-evolving threats posed by disease outbreaks and the potential actions of non-state actors.

Further, we feel that there is a general view that we ought to re-double our National and International efforts to enhance transparency and build confidence

in terms of compliance with the Convention. We note that a number of suggestions have been tabled in this regard, for example, enhancing the existing Confidence Building Measures returns (CBMs) and measures to encourage the submission and publication of national returns. In addition, we feel that there is an openness to explore other voluntary measures to enhance transparency, such as peer review mechanisms.

In this year of the Review Conference, in an effort to enhance transparency and confidence, we undertook a review of our own CBM returns in order to ensure that we, as a State Party to the BTWC, are doing all that we can to engender confidence with the Convention. We look forward to further discussions on this topic and if States Parties felt it useful, we would be happy to share our experiences in this regard.

Mr Chairman,

As was evidenced at April's Preparatory Committee and reiterated in the comments and papers put forward by various States Parties, we feel that there is an understanding that advances in Science and Technology should be an area of focus.

Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology are occurring on a daily basis, and there are many opportunities for the exploitation of such advances for peaceful purposes. However, these advances also carry inherent risk of dual use and require thoughtful and careful management. It is clear that this topic is uppermost in the minds of our fellow States Parties and we feel that this issue should be a core area of focus for the upcoming Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

To achieve progress in a number of key areas, we would support the principle of establishing working groups on areas such as universalisation and Articles VII and X. In recent years, Ireland has taken part in a number of initiatives which we believe demonstrates our commitment to international assistance and collaboration, as envisaged by Article X. Full details of these projects can be found in the EU Working Paper on Article X.

Ireland would look forward to participating in dedicated workshops which could focus on promoting, encouraging and extending existing efforts, improving coordination and identifying capability gaps to be filled.

Mr Chairman,

Another common area we identified in many of the submissions is the role envisaged for the ISU. We believe that the support provided by the ISU is invaluable and we would like to express our gratitude to them. Further, Ireland would like to see the role of the ISU continued and enhanced and to this end, we have recently provided funding to support them in their work.

It is clear to us from the various submissions that most States Parties envisage the ISU continuing to play a strong role in terms of supporting the work of the BTWC, and in some instances, States Parties see the ISU as having additional roles and responsibilities. Ireland would support such an enhanced role for the ISU, but we must recognise that the ISU needs adequate financial and staff resources, to continue in their existing role and even more so, if we are to consider enhancing their role and responsibilities. We would like our colleagues to bear this in mind in advance of the Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

The BTWC remains the sole internationally recognised legal instrument in the pursuit of disarmament and non-proliferation of biological and toxin weapons, and, as we now prepare for the 2016 Review Conference, we, as States Parties, should make every effort to ensure its continuing relevance and effectiveness. I look forward to our deliberations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ENDS