

German Opening Statement
Meeting of Experts to the BTWC
Monday 18 August 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to begin by welcoming you in the chair as President of this 2008 Meeting of Experts from States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention. Being in full agreement with the EU Statement delivered by the distinguished delegate from France at the beginning of the meeting, I would like to highlight a few points which are of particular interest to us.

Prohibitions and preventive measures are the two cornerstones of the Convention to create and maintain a world free of biological weapons. The Convention is not a treaty that limits the use of biological agents and toxins for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes; it does not restrict research, development or economic use of such materials as long as activities are justified by these purposes. However, based on the inherent risks of human, animal and plant pathogens and toxins States have developed and implemented ample legislation preventing accidental exposure to and release of dangerous biological materials and protecting their population and the environment.

The measures developed to protect workforce, the population as a whole, animals, crops, the food and feed chains include restriction of access to dangerous biological materials to people with a need to work with such materials. These measures are equally applicable to prevent biological agents and toxins falling in the hands of people who may use them for weapons purposes. We know these measures already for a long time as biosafety measures. New threats and challenges are the reason for improving the protection of highly dangerous biological materials against theft and diversion by biosecurity measures complementing the biosafety efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

Ever since we started the discussion of biosafety and biosecurity in the intersessional process, we have seen a lot of progress in implementation efforts based on the understanding that implementing such measures serves two purposes: the protection of people and the environment against accidental release as well as improving national security.

Meetings of Experts like this provide two opportunities: to take stock of where we stand with our national implementation as well as exchanging ideas and views how to improve national efforts in gaining our common goal, i.e. maintaining a world free of biological weapons.

On the behalf of the European Union, Germany has prepared two stocktaking papers that describe common relevant EU legislation as well as the implementation status of biosafety and biosecurity measures in EU Member States. Both papers describe the present status, but also address future activities of the EU filling possible gaps in implementation.

Knowing who, why and for what purpose works with pathogens and toxins is a key prerequisite for any decision making to implement and/or improve national legislation controlling biological materials. Germany has prepared a working paper that describes as an example our legal approaches to get a complete picture of national public and private sector biological activities.

Theft and diversion of dangerous biological materials are not only linked to persons who from the outside may try to get such materials in their hands, but also to persons that work in biological facilities. Under the agenda item of risk management, Germany has prepared a working paper describing how we do security vetting of personal working with highly toxic substances and pathogens.

The tremendous progress in life sciences and recent developments in the field of synthetic biology are creating more and more understanding in the scientific community that the self-control of science is a necessary element to complement legislative measures as well as to maintain the freedom of science. In April 2008 the largest German research funding organisation has published its Code of Conduct titled Work with highly pathogenic microorganisms and toxins. We will introduce this Code with a working paper on Thursday under the relevant agenda item. The issue of such Codes was also addressed in a one-day workshop at the Federal Foreign Office in July this year in Berlin with representatives from professional associations, industry and governmental agencies.

Mr. Chairman,

We look forward to and would welcome the opportunity to further discuss any of these and other areas with the States Parties in the next days.