

**MEETING OF EXPERTS OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE
BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION
18 to 22 AUGUST 2008**

**Statement by Dr. Brian Rappert, Department of Sociology & Philosophy;
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Mr. Chairman,

States Parties are considering two important issues this year in discussing and promoting common understanding and effective action on:

- 1. National, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins.*
- 2. Oversight, education, awareness raising, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention.*

I will restrict my statement to the latter topics and within that the issues of education and awareness raising. This intervention is based on my educational experience over the last several years with those in the life sciences across some 13 countries. In that time I have had the opportunity to interact with thousands of researchers, numerous government officials, professional representatives, and many others. I am indebted to those that have facilitated and taken part in this work.

Mr. Chairman, my experience has informed my assessment that, overall, those associated with the life sciences have given insufficient attention to date to concerns about the misuse of their research in relation to activities prohibited by the BWC. To be sure, there are those who have given this matter sustained and considered attention. Yet, the potential for misuse remains a non-issue at a personal and professional level for many. On the positive side, any individual or collective deficiency in the attention given to the misuse of research might be the result of biological weapons being rendered morally unacceptable options. In a non-trivial way, their development has become unthinkable for many. Whatever the reasons, it is not appropriate for the practice of relegating misuse concerns to the margins to continue in the future.

What then can the international community achieve working together within the BWC in 2008?

Mr. Chairman, in my estimation, the meeting this year has a crucial role to play; not least in signalling the importance States Parties jointly accord to preventing the misuse of developments in bioscience and biotechnology. Fostering widespread awareness and education has and will require an iterative process of building attention and activities between a wide range of actors. Within this, collective statements by States or professional associations enable those engaged with this topic to form a

shared sense of expectations for the future. Based on my experience, I can testify to how the agendas and statements from the BWC have directly or circuitously figured within recent emerging professional discussions.

Against the background of previous calls in the BWC to science communities, this year the signalling role can be well served by the common understanding agreed being as specific as possible. Such calls could then provide a vision for sustained activities into the future. In this regard, States Parties could explicitly agree, in December that:

- A fundamental principle in preventing the destructive use of the life sciences is that the benign intent of individuals is not a sufficient response to preventing misuse.

- All those graduating from higher education in fields associated with the life sciences should be familiar with the international prohibition against biological weapons.

- All those undertaking professional research careers should have received effective training or instruction related to preventing the misuse of their research.

- Each government represented here should commit itself to initiating a dialogue with their respective national science academies about how the present low level of awareness can swiftly be corrected.

- The inclusion of those in the life sciences and other professionals within the BWC would be facilitated by increasing the openness of the Convention to non-state actors.

Mr. Chairman, the growing concern with biosecurity in general in recent years also offers the opportunity to integrate life science communities into the Convention by reinvigorating some of the vision that marked the initial adoption of the BWC. From its inception the BWC represented a compact between diverse countries that had as a central goal to further the application of science towards the prevention of disease. Any biosecurity-inspired measures needed in today's environment could be an opportunity to update and renew that cooperate spirit.

Mr. Chairman, international civil society stands ready with you and States to take these issues forward. Thank you for your attention.

Written 11 August 2008