

**THE 2008 AGENDA:  
Expectations from the Chair**

Statement to the Diplomatic Training Course on the 2008 Meetings of the BWC by  
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Chairman of the 2008 Meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention

It is a pleasure to be able to attend this event, which from my point of view as Chairman of the 2008 meetings of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is both well timed and important - as it will make a substantial contribution to our collective preparations.

I have listened attentively to all that has been said so far and I am sure that this course will provide you with solid foundations on which to participate in the work of the BWC this year.

As we have heard, pretty much since the start of the decade, work under the BWC has been relatively uncontroversial. In fact it has come to be known for its constructive and collegial atmosphere. It has been noted that the BWC has managed to make consistent progress, even during times when forward momentum has been absent from other disarmament and non-proliferation settings. The BWC is still driving forwards, reaching out within its existing membership, to states currently outside of its provisions, and to broader communities of stakeholders.

You will be playing an important role in this success story and joining a motivated fellowship if you take part in the BWC meetings in 2008. From my own experience I know that meetings of the BWC are keen to hear from the 'silent majority' of States – those that attend such meetings but make no interventions. Contributing to the BWC is not as politically charged or as sensitive as it can be in other forums. All States Parties have important contributions that they can and should make at BWC meetings, whatever the size of their delegation, whether or not they have experts from capital, and irrespective of how long they have followed the issues.

By attending this course, and indicating your interest in learning more about the BWC you, and your missions, have taken the first step in ensuring that our Convention continues to represent the views of all its membership. Today, you have started a journey, one that you will not have to take alone, which will provide you with the tools you will need to make a significant contribution at the Meeting of Experts, and in a wider sense to building the effectiveness of the Convention as a barrier against the development and use of biological weapons.

Having urged you to get more involved in the BWC and congratulated you for the steps you have taken so far, I would like to outline how I see this year developing.

Activities of the Chair to date

As a Valentine's Day gift, on 14 February I wrote to all States Parties and provided them with my initial thoughts on this year's meetings. This letter, which is included in your information package, provides information on: national information and updates; identifying relevant

organisations and experts; background documents; interaction among experts; sponsorship for participation; universalization activities; and Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs).

Having mentioned the CBMs, let me quickly remind you at this point that the deadline for the submission of national CBM reports is rapidly approaching. They should be in Geneva by 15 April. I encourage all States Parties to participate. If you would like any additional information on the CBMs or the submission process, please get in touch with the Implementation Support Unit.

It is my intention this year to closely follow the successful practices established in previous BWC meetings. There will be no sudden changes or surprises: I will be as open and as transparent as possible. All of our work will be in accordance with the mandate set by the Sixth Review Conference. Any and all decisions taken by States Parties will be made by consensus.

That having been said, and having paid close attention to how BWC meetings work, I have some minor suggestions on how to deal more efficiently and effectively with the issues on the table this year. In line with my aims for openness, I shared my ideas with the States Parties and hope to develop them further in consultations with all interested parties.

Since this letter was sent out, I have been meeting with the regional groups and with states bilaterally to hear their views. I met with the Non-Aligned Group and Other States on 27<sup>th</sup> February, the Western Group on 29<sup>th</sup> February, and the Eastern Group last Friday. These meetings have been very useful in helping me to refine my thinking.

In general terms, the feedback I have had to date has been positive. There have been some questions raised over certain details, and I am discussing these with the interested delegations. The importance of promoting the involvement of developing countries, both through official delegations and as 'guests of the meeting', was also stressed in my meetings with the regional groups. I am hoping that events such as this one will contribute to making this a reality. If as a result of this seminar, or for any other reason, you have thoughts, feedback or insights, at any time this year, I would be pleased to meet with you and discuss them. As I said, I hope that during my Chairmanship of the BWC our Convention can become even more inclusive.

#### Activities of the Chair over the coming months

I am currently considering all the feedback I have had to date, as well as the research being done by the Implementation Support Unit, as well as my continuing bilateral discussions. I will shortly be writing to States Parties again. In this second letter, I will be developing my thoughts further, evolving those ideas I have already put on the table and putting some more 'flesh' on the 'bare bones' of my last letter.

Once this second letter has been distributed, and allowing sufficient time for its content to be digested, sent to capitals and instructions sent back, I will be seeking to hold a second set of consultations with the regional groups. This will provide an additional opportunity for feedback and coordination in preparing for our summer meeting. I expect that by the time this second round of consultations has been completed, it will be time to start preparing for the Meeting of Experts in earnest.

### Structuring our discussions

At the moment, I am deliberately keeping my ideas broad, in order to allow the process to develop organically according to the demands of BWC members and the technical nature of the issues under consideration.

However, it is clear that given the size of the topics for 2008 that they will need to be broken down into more manageable chunks, so that we can structure our efforts in such a way as to maximise our use of time. I have been thinking about how we might best accomplish this. As you will have read, our topics are as follows:

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.*

On the first topic, biosafety and biosecurity, it will be important to ensure we take advantage of contributions from relevant international organisations (such as the World Health Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), as well as the professional scientific associations and individual experts present at the meeting.

Building upon the work of previous years, I hope we will also be able to identify common elements of national approaches to biosafety and biosecurity. Discovering how similar our individual efforts are assists us in harmonising our regimes. Detailing useful approaches and components also assists those revising or creating biosafety and biosecurity regimes.

I am also keen to ensure that we thoroughly explore the utility of risk management approaches for biosafety and biosecurity. This is an issue that appears time and time again in my research and has cropped up repeatedly during my discussions and consultations.

The second of this year's topics is already split into three general areas: scientific oversight, including relevant scientific and technological advances since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006; outreach on the BWC, 1925 Geneva Protocol and UN Security Council Resolution 1540, including aspects of education and awareness raising; and codes of conduct, as discussed in 2005. Each one of these sub-topics is quite a challenge to address in its own right and I am sure we will not suffer from lack of input.

### Resources to help us prepare

Our topics this year cover a wide range of technical and policy issues, and involve many actors at the international, regional and national levels. As a result, we will need to plan carefully and prepare well in advance to ensure that we deal with the topics comprehensively and efficiently in the very limited time we have at hand.

We will need to make best use of all of the tools at our disposal. As was done in the past, the ISU will be preparing background information papers which will act both as an introductory

guide to the topics under consideration, and as a briefing on the key issues likely to come up. The list of papers that will be prepared can be found in my letter to States Parties.

These documents will require a considerable amount of work by the ISU. Every effort will be made to release these documents as soon as possible and they will be available by the start of August at the latest. This should provide enough time for everyone to familiarise themselves with their content and to help in preparing for our meeting.

The background papers will also point you to a number of additional reports and documents which will deal with specific aspects of the topics in more depth. Should you have the opportunity to prepare in more depth, these additional resources might be a useful starting point.

I am also tasking the ISU with putting together an online compendium of national approaches to our 2008 topics. This compendium will not replace any existing arrangements but rather will complement them. The compendium will be compiled directly from contributions made by States Parties. The ISU will be going back through statements, presentations and working papers from relevant meetings in 2003 and 2005 and compiling them in one place. As States make additional information available in advance of, or during, the Meeting of Experts it will be added to the compendium. The compendium will then act as a central reference point for national activities relevant to our discussions this year and will be accessible from anywhere at anytime – assisting those states not in a position to bring a national expert to the meeting itself.

I would encourage you, as part of your preparations for the Meeting of Experts, to speak with your capitals and your colleagues in health and education ministries to find out what measures your country has in place and how they are put into practice. I would also encourage you to find out what you can as soon as possible. When you have some information, if you make it available to the Implementation Support Unit, they will add it to the compendium. If you wish, this information can also be released as an official working paper of the meeting, and you are welcome to introduce your national contributions during our working sessions.

### Dealing with the substance

Based upon past meetings of the BWC, I expect that a significant number of States Parties will wish to make general opening statements. While I am not discouraging states from doing this, I am encouraging them to keep these interventions short, so that we can turn our attention to substance as soon as possible. I will also be encouraging those delegations that have contributed information to the online compendium to introduce their national approaches, in summary, as part of their general statements. For those interested in preparing and making an opening statement, examples from past meetings can be found online at the BWC website: [www.unog.ch/bwc](http://www.unog.ch/bwc).

Once the general statements are concluded we will move on to our working sessions. In the past, a significant number of statements and presentations have detailed the type of national information I am hoping we will be able to include in the compendium. By having this information available to all delegates online, and by providing opportunities to introduce it in summary form, I am hoping we will free up additional time for thematic and substantive

discussions. This will help ensure we take every opportunity given to use to deal with these complex topics and maximise the benefits of bringing so many experts together.

A number of delegations will include national experts, who will travel to Geneva especially for the meeting. Some of these will contribute openly on the floor of the meeting. Even if your delegation is unlikely to have its own expert, I know many of these individuals are keen to interact more with participants, and I would encourage you to introduce yourself directly to them. If you prefer, you might consider having a word with either the ISU or myself and we might be able to introduce you to an expert on an issue that interests you.

I have also been thinking about how to improve our use of external expertise. Increasing numbers of international and professional organisations are interested in contributing to BWC meetings. I am keen to ensure that we take advantage of those most qualified to help us in our work in such a manner that it represents the true global nature of the biological sciences. I have requested the help of States Parties in identifying those experts and organisations which they would most like to hear from. I am particularly keen to hear proposals of organisations from developing countries. If you have any thoughts on this please contact either the ISU or myself.

The Meeting of Experts will also likely use discussion panels of the kind introduced by the Chairman of the 2007 meetings. These provide an opportunity for a small number of highly qualified individuals, from key disciplines, to interact with the Chair and with delegations on specific aspects of the topics under consideration. These panels should allow all delegations access to independent expertise and opinion, irrespective of whether or not they have brought their own expert.

I am also planning on organising *poster sessions* for experts on the margin of the official meeting. Although many of the diplomats I have spoken with were unfamiliar with the concept (as I was myself), national scientific experts are very enthusiastic about the idea and seem to have persuaded their bureaucratic colleagues of the wisdom of the enterprise. The session will be an opportunity for experts to put together engaging posters on their areas of interest. It will be an opportunity for you to circulate amongst the experts, to find out what they are experts in, and to introduce yourself to those you would like to speak to more.

There should be no shortage of information at the Meeting of Experts. The success of the meeting will largely depend upon how well we make use of these resources. I am convinced that with clever planning and flexibility from all States Parties we will be able to cover all our topics, make a significant contribution to the work of the Convention, and produce a successful outcome for the Meeting of Experts.

#### Outcome of the Meeting of Experts

I would expect that the outcome document of the Meeting of Experts will closely resemble those produced in the past. That is, it will comprise a procedural account of our work, to which I would annex (under my own authority, as was done in the past), a list of the perspectives, recommendations, and proposals heard during the meeting.

### Meeting of States Parties

The Meeting of States Parties for 2008 will be held from 1 to 5 December. It will likely take the technical discussions from our summer meeting and place them within the broader context of the BWC. States will consider how to integrate the best ideas into their efforts under the Convention.

The Meeting of States Parties will probably be able to draw on a number of resources, including:

- *The report of the Meeting of Experts* – including its annex on the substantive elements of our discussions in August, so it will be important to ensure that this document reflects our discussions as closely as possible. As in previous years, I will prepare a "synthesis paper" that reflects the main elements of the substantive annex.
- *Official documents* – all of the background documents prepared for the Meeting of Experts will also be available for the Meeting of States Parties.
- *Online information* – The ISU will maintain the compendium of national approaches throughout the course of the year, updating it as more information becomes available. Data submitted by states and the international organizations participating in this year's BWC meetings will also be distributed from time to time via the ISU's website.
- *Expert participants* – Many delegations will have similar membership at both meetings, ensuring that the discussions that take place in August are reflected in the meeting at the end of the year.

It is early in the year to be thinking about the Meeting of States Parties and our thinking will likely develop quite considerably between now and then. We should, however, keep our objective for this year in the forefront of our mind throughout all our work. Ultimately we have been charged with finding ways to take effective action on biosafety, biosecurity, the oversight of science, and education and awareness raising, in order to strengthen the prohibition of biological weapons.

### Conclusion

Although many demands are made on the time of Geneva missions, I believe that devoting some of it to the Biological Weapons Convention will be in your interest. The BWC deals with issues that are central to both international peace and security and to economic and social development. The topics, while appearing complicated, are often dealt with in an accessible manner. The atmosphere in which the meetings takes place is relaxed and convivial by comparative standards. Your fellow States Parties are interested to hear what you have to say and are keen to see you engage with the Convention more actively. Lastly, this is not something you have to do on your own. We will be producing papers, information and resources to help you to take part. The ISU and myself are here at your disposal and would be pleased to talk over how you can contribute to the 2008 meetings of the BWC.

Thank you very much.

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