



Key EU messages

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)

Meeting of Experts on Institutional Strengthening of the Convention (MX5)

Geneva, 8 September 2021

Madame Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia¹, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) is a fundamental pillar of the international community's efforts to prevent disease from ever being used as a weapon, and we are of the firm belief that every possible effort should be made to strengthen it and ensure its full and effective implementation. We look forward to building on past years' discussions and exploring how best to strengthen the Convention in the face of rapidly evolving developments in science and technology, the current and possible future biological events, and the continued threat of use of biological agents or toxins.

While verification remains a central element of a complete and effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime, we recognize that there is no consensus regarding verification at this stage. In this regard, we recall, inter alia, the UK's Working Paper on: Institutional Strengthening of the Convention: Reflections on the 2001 Protocol and the Verification Challenge (BWC/MSP/2019MX.5/WP.1). At the same time, we firmly believe that the lack of consensus on the verification issue must not hinder the implementation nor the strengthening of the Convention.

The EU supports the ongoing efforts to enhancing transparency and building confidence in compliance with the Convention as well as its effective implementation. For this purpose, we invite

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

all States Parties to submit regular, timely and comprehensive Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) to the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), to increase sharing information and best practices on national capabilities, activities and actions for implementation, and to consider conducting or participating in peer review initiatives and voluntary visits to relevant facilities and other transparency and confidence-building initiatives. Let me underline that the purpose of such initiatives is not to replace legally-binding verification measures, but to strengthen national implementation and thereby the BTWC.

We invite States Parties also to consider enhancing the effectiveness of the consultative procedures under Article V of the Convention with a view to building and sustaining confidence in compliance. This could be achieved through operationalizing the procedures for bilateral and multilateral consultations, as proposed in the EU working paper circulated ahead of the Eighth Review Conference (BWC/CONF.VIII/WP.16). If these types of measures were to be adopted, they may allow States Parties to select a method of consultation commensurate to the gravity of the problem identified.

BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU)

The assistance the ISU provides to States Parties for the implementation of their Treaty obligations and to the intersessional work programme is invaluable. The EU continues to support the strengthening of the ISU's role and the inclusion of further activities in its mandate, such as standing science and technology advisory and liaison function, coordination of universalisation activities, and support to national points of contact in compiling and submitting CBM forms.

Timely and full contributions to the BTWC budget are the essential requirement for the well-functioning of the Convention and its strengthening, including for convening regular meetings and sustaining the ISU. Once again, we call on all States to fulfil their financial obligations under the Convention and to pay their assessed contributions on time and in full. We urge States Parties in arrears to pay their dues without further delay.

Supporting the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism

The EU remains a strong supporter of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM). In case of a biological weapon incident, the Mechanism is currently the only investigative tool in place. We have supported its operationalisation in order to strengthen both Article VI and indirectly Article VII of the BTWC.

Notably, on 2 June 2020, the EU adopted a Council Decision dedicated to supporting the UNSGM. This Decision is implemented by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and it provides 1.4 million EUR over three years for:

- (a) support for training of experts on the SGM roster;

- (b) capacity-building of laboratories from developing countries;
- (c) outreach activities to ensure the nomination to the SGM roster of experts and laboratories from the Global South;
- (d) support for a full field exercise (Capstone Exercise);
- (e) support for regular coordination activities or workshops or both with relevant organisational partners.

Kazakhstan's proposal to establish International Agency for Biosafety (IABS)

Madame Chair,

We have taken note of Kazakhstan's proposal to establish an International Agency for Biosafety (IABS) and their intention to submit the proposal to the Ninth Review Conference next year. We thank Kazakhstan for the presentation of its proposal and the subsequent information provided this afternoon. We are looking forward to receiving further details on the proposal, among others on possible overlaps with the mandates not only of the BTWC, but also other organisations and initiatives such as WHO and OIE, or the ZODIAC initiative of the IAEA.

Gender equality

Madame Chair,

The EU is also fully committed to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control work in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, including through promoting women's participation and providing integrated support where appropriate. In this regard, we welcome that consensus UNGA resolution on the Prohibition of the Development Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction has been encouraging since 2019 the equal participation of women and men in the framework of the Convention. The EU will continue promoting such an approach.

This type of political advocacy is helpful in providing the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs the support needed to push forward in reaching the Agenda for Disarmament Goals. The European Union is a firm supporter of Actions 36 and 37 of United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which focuses on the "Full and Equal Participation of Women in Decision-Making Processes" and "Gender Parity on Disarmament Bodies established by the Secretariat" respectively.

Thank you, Madame Chair