



# IRELAND

## **BWC Meeting of Experts**

**MX2 on Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention**

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2021**

### **Intervention by Ireland**

Thank you Chair,

Ireland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union and would like to add the following remarks in a national capacity.

Firstly, I wish to congratulate you, Chair, on your election as Chair of this Meeting of Experts on Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention. We sincerely appreciate the efforts you have undertaken, including through informal consultations, and look forward to working constructively with you and all delegations to make concrete progress ahead of the Ninth Review Conference.

Chair,

We would like to thank Belgium for its comprehensive presentation of the working paper on biorisk management standards and their role in BTWC implementation, which Ireland is pleased to co-sponsor. . Ireland is fully committed to strengthening biosafety and biosecurity

compliance under Articles IV and X. As my Belgian colleague has noted, while industrial standards do not relieve States Parties of their obligations to ensure effective biorisk management through national implementation of the BTWC, they are nonetheless a valuable means of facilitating implementation. Ireland strongly reiterates the call from our Belgian colleague that dialogue be pursued in the intersessional programme of work with representatives from biosafety associations, the life sciences community and international standards organisations, in order to raise awareness of the importance of effective biorisk management. We further encourage States Parties to provide assistance, as appropriate, for the implementation of biorisk management standards in life science institutions, in accordance with Article X.

In addition to industrial standards, voluntary Codes of Conduct for those involved in biotechnology and the biological sciences can also play an important role in encouraging compliance with the object and purpose of the BTWC. To this end, Ireland recognises the constructive efforts of China and Pakistan towards achieving better biosafety and biosecurity through their recent working paper.

Chair,

In relation to the establishment of a science and technology review mechanism, it is clear that the BTWC today exists in a scientific context which has developed considerably since the 1972 text was drafted. Agreement on a Science and Technology review mechanism is a top priority for my delegation and urgently required. Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology today are occurring at an accelerated pace. Many of these scientific advances bring added benefits to society and assist us in our achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We need look no further than the development of Covid-19 vaccines, achieved in record time, in order to realise the speed of advancement. We must also, however, remain vigilant of the potential risks that co-exist alongside these peaceful benefits.

Advancement in biological sciences in the past two years, spurred on by the pandemic, alongside environmental and energy concerns, has accelerated at a speed that could jeopardise effective regulation and policy oversight. This underscores the necessity of establishing a science and technology review mechanism. The rapid pace of scientific developments and in

particular, the dual-use nature of biological agents and toxins, requires us to ensure that the inherent risks associated with these items are monitored and controlled carefully. The timely provision of expert advice to States Parties on developments in science and technology related to the Convention will afford States Parties the opportunity to make better informed decisions and help us to design new measures to assist in the full implementation of the convention.

Chair,

Ireland welcomes your informal paper, which collates the various proposals on the establishment of an S&T mechanism as an excellent basis for further discussion. We welcome the growing consensus among States Parties on the necessity of an S&T mechanism and hope your paper will help us to bridge the remaining gaps.

For my delegation, it is imperative to avoid politicising this issue. Ireland fully supports the establishment of a mechanism comprised of an independent board of technical experts and scientists. . Participation should be, first and foremost, on the basis of relevant expertise, so that the mechanism can stay fit for purpose and keep up with scientific advancements.

Ireland continues to support the strengthening of the ISU's role in this area too, such as through the establishment of a standing science and technology advisory and liaison function. Expanding the ISU's function would better serve the interests of the States Parties and strengthen the BWC; however, we recognise this could only be achieved with additional ISU resources.

Ultimately, the outcome from the establishment of a science and technology review mechanism should be a tool that will provide guidance and answers to questions from States Parties: efficient, informative, and responsive to ever-evolving science.

Thank you.