



IRELAND

BWC Meeting of Experts

MX5 on Institutional Strengthening of the Convention

8th 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 take the opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Chair. We sincerely appreciate the efforts you have undertaken in preparing this meeting, and I can assure you of my delegation's full support.

Chair,

Ireland is fully committed to the institutional strengthening of the BTWC. We must acknowledge from the outset that the Convention remains comparatively institutionally weak. It contains no operational capacity to respond to biological attacks or provisions to verify compliance with the Convention. This sets it apart from similar disarmament instruments, such

as the Chemical Weapons Convention. As such, in order to strengthen the functioning of the Convention, additional legal and voluntary measures should be explored. It is widely accepted that robust verification mechanisms improve confidence in, and the functioning of, disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. The lack of a formal inspection system or enforcement mechanism in the BWC has, arguably, diluted the efficacy of the Convention.

While we acknowledge the lack of consensus on the issue between States Parties to date, my delegation strongly encourages this meeting, as well as the MSP and Review Conference next year, to continue to explore the issue in greater depth.

While they are not a substitute for an effective mechanism for verification and compliance, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) serve as an important national transparency measure to enhance trust between States Parties and in the Convention itself. The low rates of CBM submissions has hampered their utility and my delegation urges all delegations to increase the sharing information and best practices. Peer review initiatives and voluntary visits to relevant facilities and other transparency and confidence-building initiatives would also help to institutionally strengthen the convention.

Chair,

The role played by the Implementation Support Unit since the Sixth Review Conference in providing administrative support to States Parties and facilitating compliance with the Convention has been crucial and must be recognised. My delegation wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the ISU staff for their hard work in providing vital institutional support to States Parties for implementation of BTWC obligations, particularly over the past year. We appreciate that their work is made even more challenging when compounded by financial difficulties. States Parties must take seriously their financial commitments relating to the Convention and pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

Ireland continues to support the strengthening of the ISU's role and the inclusion of further activities in its mandate, such as a standing science and technology advisory and liaison function as discussed in MX2 last week. We would also welcome increased ISU support for national points of contacts in compiling and submitting CBM forms and we recognise the efforts of the ISU to date in providing assistance and training in this area. Expanding the ISU's

function to enable it to further support implementation can only be to the benefit of States Parties and will strengthen the BTWC. We recognise however, that such an ambition requires adequate resourcing.

Chair,

Ireland welcomes the many substantive working documents which have informed this Meeting of Experts. We particularly wish to highlight our appreciation of the paper on enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment, submitted by Panama. The paper sets out practical and wide-ranging proposals: from suggesting a standing agenda item on gender mainstreaming for the MSP and Review Conference; to the appointment of a gender focal point; to support research on the differentiated gender impact of bio-agents.

As co-chair of the International Gender Champions' Disarmament Impact Group in Geneva, Ireland was pleased to host an interactive discussion on advancing gender perspectives in the BTWC in June, in conjunction with the Implementation Support Unit. The event launched the most recent factsheet on Gender Equality in the Biological Weapons Regime. Worryingly, the data shows that the BTWC is far from reaching equality in terms of participation. For example, at the 2019 MSP, only 20% of delegations were led by women. Similarly, only 22% of the national statements were delivered by women. Such underrepresentation can reinforce existing biases and excludes the perspectives and knowledge of large segments of the population. The evidence is clear that diverse participation and the full, meaningful, and equal participation of women and men in our meetings would benefit the Convention. As such it is an issue that impacts all States Parties and we must work collectively to address the issue.

Lastly, Chair,

The pandemic's spread in early 2020 and the global shutdown which ensued has shown us in the starkest terms how quickly biosecurity and biosafety threats may emerge. The work of the Convention should not be sluggish in the face of bio-incidents and developments which, as we have seen, can be unpredictable, rapid, and consequential. When we talk about the Convention's institutional strength, we are talking about its effectiveness; and the effectiveness of the Convention is hindered if we adopt a passive mindset that real progress regarding the BTWC can only be made at Review Conferences once every five years. It is, therefore,

important for us to strengthen the Inter-Sessional Process, particularly the MSPs and reinforce their authority for taking and implementing effective decisions. In this regard, we appreciate the UK working paper and look forward to examining in greater depth how to improve decision-making processes within the Convention by integrating a more flexible and dynamic approach.

Thank you.