

## **Statement by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on agenda item of 4 of MX 2**

### **Item 4: Review of science and technology developments relevant to the Convention, including for the enhanced implementation of all articles of the Convention as well as the identification of potential benefits and risks of new science and technology developments relevant to the Convention, with a particular attention to positive implications**

In our working paper we have offered some considerations about what we need to discuss when we review developments of science and technology (S&T) as well as some considerations about the review process of S&T in light of the proposals made by some delegations regarding strengthening the review process.

New scientific and technological advancements in the field of bio sciences have brought both benefits and challenges. They require monitoring by BWC States Parties. In the course of the intersessional discussions since 2012 most of these developments have been identified, such as synthetic biology, gene sequencing, genome editing and CRISPR technology, nanotechnology, technologies for the design, production and delivery of more efficient and economical vaccines, 3-D printing technology, computational biology and cloud laboratories.

Many actual benefits arising from advances in S&T for public health and industry have also been noted in the previous years' discussions, such as improved diagnostic and detection methods resulting from advances in enabling technologies and why increasing availability and affordability of these technologies and techniques could strengthen and accelerate the ability to detect and react quickly to an infectious disease outbreak. The potential beneficial applications of these advances, for example, as research tools in understanding infectious disease mechanisms and in treatment, need to be elaborated further.

A significant part of the discussions in previous years were focused on the possible negative implications of advances in S&T for the Convention. We note the potential of some developments for use contrary to the provisions of the Convention. At the same time we note some of these implications are not certain. However, they need to be taken into account and discussed. States Parties should reaffirm their commitment that they use these sciences and technologies consistent with the peaceful object and purpose of the Convention.

So far, most of the discussions in MX 2 on review of S&T have been focused on minimising the potential risks. MX needs to discuss ways and means of maximising the actual benefits of new scientific and technological advancements in the field of bio sciences, such as approaches for increasing availability and promoting access to and use of the above-mentioned technologies and know-how in developing countries. We have not discussed ways and means to reduce gaps between developing and developed BWC States Parties in this regard.

We need to achieve a balance in the MX 2 discussions. Review of the developments in the related science and technology should contribute to the fullest exchange of knowledge and technology between developed and developing countries and ensure the unhindered and non-discriminatory flow of science and technology. States Parties have commitment under article X to cooperate in contributing to the development and application of scientific discoveries for prevention of disease or for other peaceful purposes. In this regard, the developed States Parties bear a special responsibility.

The BWC provisions, in no way, recognize distinction between haves and have-nots in the field of bio-science and bio-technology; therefore, the "non-proliferation concern" has no sensible meaning in relations with the cooperation among the States Parties. The BWC should not be misused to impose restrictions and/or limitations on transfers of biological agents, toxins, scientific knowledge, technology, equipment and materials for peaceful purposes among the States Parties.

With regard to the proposals to reorganize review process for S&T issues, we would like to share some considerations. The review of S&T developments has evolved over time. For years, since 1980 this review was used to be done only once every five years according to Article XII of the Convention. In the draft of the legally binding protocol to strengthen the Convention an option was envisaged for the establishment of an advisory committee for S&T with the decision of States Parties after the entry into force of the protocol. But with the collapse of the negotiations of the protocol that option was lost and we had intersessional process (ISP) from 2003 onwards. After maturing the ISP, it was in 2012 that States Parties decided to allocate a standing agenda item in the ISP for review of S&T. And only one day was devoted to review some specific issues of S&T during the ISP between 2013 and 2015. This was the case until 2016. In the eighth review conference States Parties were not able to decide on the next ISP.

For review of S&T in the course of the current intersessional process, States Parties decided in 2017 to reorganize and upgrade the review process in a new format through convening an annual dedicated session of Meeting of Experts. This new format has its own independent substantive agenda as well as factual report. This new format, compared to the previous intersessional process which took place between 2012 and 2015, represents an important upgrade.

The recently enhanced process for the review of S&T has significant positive features. It is inclusive and open to all BWC States Parties, experts of developed and developing countries can participate without discrimination in discussions of the issue. More time has been allotted to review of S&T developments than before. Now it has two full working days available. It has attracted the attention and participation of more governmental and non-governmental

technical experts than before. It now provides an independent factual technical report to the Meeting of States Parties. It has enabled a more structured and systematic review of S&T than before. This enhanced format is more flexible than before to accommodate possible enhancements and adjustments if the Review Conference decides to do so.

Instead of trying to create a new exclusive mechanism for the review of S&T which is a setback to the recently established S&T review process, States Parties should try to achieve the utmost advantage out of the current review process of S&T and consider ideas and way and means how this current format can be improved over time. We are open to consideration and discussion of such ideas and proposals in the context of comprehensive and balanced strengthening of the Convention in all its aspects.

It is worth recalling paragraph 9 of the summary of the Chair of the 2019 MXs in which the Chair has registered a fact as follows “a number of States Parties emphasized that any proposal on a strengthened review mechanism should not be seen in isolation but would need to be considered in a balanced manner and in the context of progress made in other areas of relevance to the Convention”. We are happy that the idea of establishing a committee for review of S&T is gaining attention and support. The NAM group for years has been proposing the establishment of a cooperation committee to oversee the international cooperation under Article X of the Convention. So it remains to be seen whether the time has come for the Convention to establish two committees and reach agreement on these two proposals in order to strengthen the Convention. We are ready to work with other delegations to reach such an agreement.