DRAFT 23 August 2019

UK Speaking Notes – 2020 BTWC Meetings of Experts

30th August – 8th September 2021

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

Chair: Mr. Kazuhiro Nakai of Japan

BWC/MSP/2020/MX.2/WP.3 - Biological risk assessment and management: a need for guiding principles and frameworks-Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Thank you Mr Chairman. Good morning/afternoon distinguished delegates and colleagues.

Biological risk assessment and management has been a key topic for discussion by the UK and others for many years, in the context of the BTWC. This not only highlights that States Parties consider this an important topic for discussion, but also a topic that calls for a substantive outcome at the forthcoming 9th Review Conference.

Biological risk assessment and management has been identified as a topic on which there is potential to move forward on

practical and institutional issues within the scope and mandate of the current Intersessional Process. Some States Parties have highlighted the need to develop broad guiding principles for biological risk assessment and management on issues specific to the Convention, which could be adapted at the national level.

Several States Parties have previously submitted Working Papers that mention a role for principles, tools, methodologies or frameworks to help analyse the potential risks and benefits from developments in science and technology. There have also been productive discussions on some examples of such principles and frameworks. As we rapidly approach the 9th Review Conference and consider proposals for a new systematic and structured science and technology review process, some of which are being presented at this meeting, it will be important to consider the approaches that build on previously broadly agreed features.

Some of which include;

- We need a more effective review process given the pace of change in science and technology,
- A new S&T review process should have a horizon scanning function – to look for convergence between technologies that may lead to benefits or risks for the Convention,
- A review process should be balanced in its assessment of risks and benefits for humanity,
- States Parties would also need to be able to task any such process with specific questions in response to S&T developments.
- Any such process would also need to be able to access the diverse range of scientific and technological disciplines relevant to the BTWC including areas of convergence such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

- A new S&T process would cover human, animal and plant sciences, and extend to government, academic, industry and other research communities and engage other international organisations where appropriate.
- An S&T review process must be inclusive and geographically representative as well as transparent with its reporting and ensure those reports are accessible to all who need to see them.
- Any decisions on recommendations for action emerging from an improved S&T review process would be a matter for States Parties to act upon nationally or on a wider scale as required.

The UK Working Paper submitted to MX2 in 2019, recommended that it would be useful to have guiding principles, tools and frameworks that could be used for risk assessment and management during the work of the next ISP. We also recommended that MX2 explore the applicability of some available frameworks and principles in the context of the BTWC.

We are pleased to see that since the 2019 MX2 further assessments of frameworks have been carried out and results have been shared with States Parties.

One such initiative to assess frameworks of potential utility to the BTWC was the Inter Academy Partnership Pilot Exercise Using Qualitative Frameworks. In August 2019, the IAP and the US National Academies convened a meeting to pilot the use of two previously developed qualitative frameworks to assess biological security concerns. Participants from a range of disciplines and geographical regions used these frameworks to assess two hypothetical case studies representing the types of scientific developments discussed in BTWC meetings. The project concluded that qualitative frameworks have features that make them suitable as tools to facilitate systematic discussions, show areas of agreement and disagreement, and provide a basis for continuing dialogue. Such frameworks enable

security risks to be assessed in a systematic manner and provide evidence-based outcomes to inform policymakers.

The project also explored how to develop a tailored framework to enable structured discussions on the positive implications of scientific developments for the BTWC. Much work remains to be done in this area, however, the group concluded that any qualitative framework used in the BTWC should evaluate both risks and benefits.

Other approaches that could be taken include tools that incorporate an element of assessing risk management options, including potential governance measures. Therefore, a set of guiding principles may be particularly appropriate in the context of governance related to BTWC obligations. This could allow States Parties to assess the range of possible governance measures and select those appropriate to develop a framework

for their national circumstances. The recent US Working Paper provides a more detailed discussion of approaches to governance for scientific and technological developments of relevance to the Convention and provides(d) a good basis for further expert discussion in this meeting.

Mr Chairman, some concluding remarks from my delegation:

During our short remaining time in this ISP we recommend that experts make concerted efforts to advance discussions on biological risk assessment and management, and aim to provide some clear recommendations that are likely to gain widespread and cross regional support at the 9th Review Conference. A key initial task for a new systematic and structured S&T review process might be to identify and develop appropriate methodologies, potentially making use of those that have been tried and tested in previous meetings. To make the best of use of the scientific and technological review process, it will be

important to include the ability to provide recommendations for consideration at subsequent meetings of SPs, which can make decisions on collective or individual measures to help exploit the benefits and manage potential risks of scientific and technological developments relevant to the BTWC.

Thank you.