



IRELAND

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Meeting of States Parties

22 November 2021

National Statement of Ireland

Thank you Chair,

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

At the outset, I wish to take the opportunity to thank you, Chair, for your work in preparing this meeting and I can assure you of my delegation's appreciation and full support.

Chair,

The BWC was the first multilaterally-negotiated Treaty to prohibit a full category of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). However, the treaty is not yet universal and we call on all states who have not yet done so to ratify this important Convention, as a key element in the international community's efforts to address WMD proliferation.

Institutionally, the Convention remains a comparatively weak instrument. It does not contain an operational capacity to respond to biological attacks or provisions to verify compliance. My delegation believes additional legal and voluntary measures should be explored. A formal inspection system or enforcement mechanism in the BWC would improve the efficacy of the Convention. While we acknowledge the lack of consensus to date, we strongly encourage delegates to meaningfully explore the issue in greater depth.

Although not a substitute for an effective mechanism for verification and compliance, we also emphasise the importance of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) as a means of boosting national transparency and enhancing trust between States Parties and in the Convention itself. This year there has been an improvement in the submission of CBMs but there is scope to improve further.

Chair,

We would like to thank Belgium for its comprehensive presentation at the Meeting of Experts (MX) of the working paper on biorisk management standards and their role in BWC implementation, which we co-sponsored. While industrial standards do not relieve States Parties of their obligations to ensure effective biorisk management, they are nonetheless a valuable means of facilitating implementation. Voluntary Codes of Conduct can also play an important role in encouraging compliance with the object and purpose of the BWC. To this end, Ireland recognises the efforts of China and Pakistan towards achieving better biosafety and biosecurity through their recent working paper.

Chair,

Agreement on a Science and Technology review mechanism is a top priority for my delegation and is urgently required. Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology today are occurring at an accelerated pace. While often beneficial, we must remain vigilant of the potential risks that co-exist alongside these peaceful benefits. The pace of advancement could jeopardise effective regulation and policy oversight. There is a requirement therefore to ensure that the inherent risks are effectively monitored and controlled. 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.

Chair,

It is unacceptable that financial issues have at times thrown into doubt the future of the intersessional programme, and the effective functioning of the Convention. The payment by States Parties of their annual assessed contributions, in full and on time, is the only guarantee of the sustainability of the BWC process. In particular, the role played by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) since the Sixth Review Conference in providing administrative support to States Parties and facilitating compliance with the Convention has been absolutely crucial and must be recognised. 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.

Chair,

Ireland is committed to working to ensure the widest and most equitable possible representation in meetings of the BWC, including with regard to gender. As co-chair of the International Gender Champions' Disarmament Impact Group in Geneva, Ireland was pleased to co-host a First Committee side event highlighting the importance of women in international security. We also hosted an interactive discussion on advancing gender perspectives in the BWC in June, in conjunction with the ISU, launching the most recent factsheet on Gender Equality in the Biological Weapons Regime. Worryingly, the data show that the BWC is still far from reaching equality in terms of participation. 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.

Chair,

As the Ninth Review Conference approaches, we should ready ourselves to translate proposals and working papers into action. The setting of concrete objectives and agreeing on resourcing are critical steps. The pandemic demonstrated in the starkest terms how quickly biosecurity and biosafety issues impact and disrupt society. It continues to illustrate the gaps and weaknesses in preparedness which still exist at local, regional, and international levels. It is vital that we avail fully of this MSP and the opportunity that we have to interact in-person, in order to make real progress across the many challenges and proposals under the auspices of this Convention.

Thank you.