



UK Mission
Geneva

**BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION
PREPARATORY COMMITTEE TO THE NINTH REVIEW CONFERENCE**

AGENDA ITEM 5: GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 4 April 2022

Since its entry into force in 1975, the United Kingdom's approach to this Convention has been twofold: to guard against any attempt to undermine it and to actively participate in efforts to strengthen it.

The path to this meeting has been difficult and its immediate backdrop – Russia's unprovoked and horrific invasion of Ukraine – is deeply troubling. We unequivocally condemn Russia's barbaric aggression, and reaffirm our solidarity with the government and people of Ukraine.

Our preparations for the Review Conference have been overshadowed by Russia's fabricated allegations about biological weapons activities in Ukraine, apparently as retrospective justification for its premeditated attack. This follows a long pattern of Russian disinformation and false claims about biological activities in the region.

Since then, Russia has used the UN Security Council to peddle these false claims. BTWC States Parties have also received two Note Verbales from Russia on this matter. They have offered no facts to substantiate their allegations, which are based on a bogus analysis of documents they claim show details of this alleged programme.

Our response to these allegations is the same here in this forum as it was in the Security Council: they are "utter nonsense".

False allegations about States Parties undertaking biological weapons activities are dangerous. They cheapen and undermine the work of the BTWC, which has stood as a bulwark against development of biological weapons for nearly fifty years. We cannot allow false claims to go unchecked, nor allow them to derail our work in the run-up to the Ninth Review Conference. If Russia is genuinely concerned about the biological activities taking place in the territory of another State Party, they should

use the mechanisms that are contained in this Convention to resolve those concerns.

Mr Vice-Chair

As well as being on guard against efforts to undermine this Convention the UK is also deeply committed to working towards increasing its effectiveness. The Ninth Review Conference presents us with an opportunity to do just this. You can rest assured of the full and active support of my delegation during our preparations.

This week, we hope the organisational tasks that remain can be dealt with efficiently to allow us maximum time to consider substantive issues. We wish to highlight two in particular: preparation for reviewing the operation of the Convention over the last five years, and preparation for consideration of issues identified in that review and potential follow-up actions.

In 2017, State Parties decided that the purpose of this latest intersessional process would be to discuss and promote common understandings and effective action. We have had many valuable discussions which have been enriched by the active participation of experts from governments, industry, academia and civil society. Disappointingly, however, we have yet again failed to progress discussions into effective action. In reviewing the operation of the Convention now, and at the Review Conference, there is one last chance to do this.

Chair, without wanting to prejudge this review process, we wish to offer some initial thoughts on three important topics.

First, our view is that science and technology underpins the Convention and helps us ensure that it remains relevant. Such science and technology developments may pose both risks and opportunities for the effective implementation of the Convention. We hope the Review Conference will reach consensus on a science and technology review process that will equip the BTWC with the right tools to respond to future biological threats.

Second, we consider operationalising Article VII of vital importance for this Convention. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how devastating an infectious disease outbreak can be when on such a vast scale. It has also revealed gaps in the global response to such events. Whether natural, accidental or deliberate in origin, global preparedness and response needs to be strengthened. We welcome South Africa's proposed guidelines for requesting assistance under Article VII and France and India's proposal for the establishment of an Article VII database.

Finally, we turn to the framework of a future package of work. This Convention has the ability to effectively respond to global biosecurity threats. But this can only

happen if decisions are taken in a timely manner and if States Parties agree to delegate certain decision making authority to other meetings throughout the intersessional period, such as the annual Meetings of States Parties, which our 2020 MX5 working paper noted is entirely consistent with the past practice of our Convention.

Mr Vice-Chair

It is our hope that we will all make the most of this preparatory process. We stand ready to continue discussions with all interested States Parties in the weeks and months ahead.

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