



**STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE MEETING OF STATES
PARTIES TO THE BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION (BWC)
11 DECEMBER 2012**

(Check against delivery)

Chairperson,

On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to express our appreciation for the transparent and inclusive manner in which you have conducted your work as Chair of the BWC meetings this year. Let me assure you of my delegation's continued co-operation and support in the execution of your duties.

South Africa associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Non-Aligned Movement and Other States Parties to the BWC.

Chairperson,

Allow me, at the outset, to reiterate South Africa's commitment to the strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). To this end, South Africa supports efforts aimed at realising a strong, effective and universally accepted Convention. In the latter regard, we welcome the recent accession by Marshall Islands to the Convention. The threat posed by biological weapons, due to the relative ease with which such weapons can be manufactured, remains a concern that cannot be ignored. South Africa shares the view that a legally-binding instrument is necessary to strengthen the Convention as a whole and to improve its implementation. Such an instrument should remain our goal. However, my delegation does not believe that the only way to achieve this is through full-time negotiations. While agreement on such a process remains a source of frustration and disappointment for many delegations, my delegation has remained willing to explore other means of strengthening the Convention. It is in this context that South Africa submitted proposals to the Seventh Review Conference aimed at achieving what should be our shared objective of strengthening the Convention and its implementation. While we were disappointed that a stronger, forward-looking outcome could be not achieved, we nevertheless regard the outcome of the Review Conference as a modest forward movement towards progress.

Chairperson,

The success of the Seventh Review Conference lies in the effective implementation of what was agreed in terms of the intersessional process leading to the next Review Conference. It is therefore imperative that the structures and agenda agreed to in 2011 be used optimally so as to build a solid foundation on which the next Review Conference could achieve success. For this reason, South Africa has submitted a working paper for this meeting that endeavours to reflect on the Meetings of Experts (MXPs). Let me briefly highlight some of the key issues.

As agreed during the Seventh Review Conference, the purpose of the intersessional process is "to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action" on the issues included in the intersessional programme. It is South Africa's view that the MXP should be utilised for in-depth technical discussions of the relevant aspects under the different agenda points in order to provide inputs for the MSP to come to conclusions to promote common understanding and effective action on these issues. Unfortunately, the technical discussions during the formal MXP in July this year did not provide sufficient material for an MXP report that would effectively promote common understanding and allow effective action on the issues raised. Some of the side-events held on the margins of the MXP generated more in-depth technical discussions, however, these were not part of the formal MXP.

In spite of initial concerns that there would be too little time during the MXP, not all the available time was utilised. A change in the general approach to the MXP may therefore be required in order to ensure that the intersessional process serves the purpose for which it was created.

Chairperson,

On the issue of Article X of the Convention, South Africa believes that is vital to focus on the developmental and co-operation features of the Convention. As an African country, South Africa believes that Article X should promote the right of States Parties to participate in the exchange of equipment, materials and scientific information for peaceful purposes, and that States Parties in a position to do so, should contribute to the further development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in this field. South Africa also strongly believes, in line with Article X of the Convention, that its implementation should not hamper economic and technological development of the peaceful uses of biological agents, but allow the beneficial elements of these agents to be developed to aid humanity. Furthermore, in the developing world where resources are often scarce and insufficient, Article X is of relevance to public health and could provide the overlap between international health, technological advancement and the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases. To this end, South Africa is committed to close collaboration with countries worldwide and within the African Continent on the implementation of the Convention and in the advancement of the goals of the BTWC at large.

South Africa also believes that increased international cooperation and assistance is required to alleviate the burden of threat posed by biological weapons. Initiatives such as the exchange in biological sciences and technology, the promotion of capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis and containment of infectious diseases, among many others, should be further explored. In achieving these objectives, an effective cooperation mechanism in which all States Parties can participate on a voluntary basis could play an important role.

During the MXP, discussions under this standing agenda item primarily involved the reiteration of national positions, while the functioning of the database that was established by the Seventh Review Conference did not attract much debate and interaction. There was also no concrete effort made to identify aspects to improve international cooperation and assistance that could be considered in order to reach common understandings.

Chairperson,

In terms of the review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention, a number of excellent expert presentations were given at the MXP. Regrettably, there was no substantive engagement on these presentations and, therefore, opportunities to come to useful common understandings were lost. In addition, a number of very useful discussions took place during lunch time side events, but these were not attended by all delegations or part of the formal MXP.

On the issues of strengthening national implementation, confidence-building measures and the promotion of universalisation, a variety of aspects were covered during the MXP, however, no effort was made to discuss these issues from a technical perspective.

Chairperson,

Although general discussions and statements by delegations will always be useful, it is necessary to have more focussed technical discussions on specific aspects to ensure that common understanding and effective action can be achieved. My delegation would therefore propose that the MSP requests the Chairperson to specifically consider the following in the development of the programme for the MXP and that delegations prepare accordingly:

Under co-operation and assistance, there should be an evaluation of the operation of the database. In this regard, the ISU could submit a report on the functioning of the database, indicating how many States Parties have posted requests and/or pledges for co-operation and any results that have been achieved from the utilisation of the database. The discussion could focus on the level of participation, the reasons for high or low levels of participation and possible measures to improve the functioning of the database. The same approach can be followed for the other elements under this agenda point.

Under science and technology, any presentations by technical experts could be followed by a discussion of each aspect raised, its relevance for the Convention, as well as further actions that may be necessary. Informal sessions of the MXP could also be utilised to accommodate technical discussions on the issues covered during the relevant side-events.

The approach of identifying potential actions and pros and cons of such actions could also be used for the other agenda items. Although no change in relation to the current practice in the compilation of the report of the MXP is suggested, the proposed approach and focussed technical discussions could guide the Chairperson in this endeavour.

In conclusion, Chairperson,

South Africa would encourage all States Parties to work as a collective in achieving the goals of the Convention, with the spirit of cooperation that is required to effectively promote the Convention's goals so as to render meaningful services to humanity and to eradicate the threat of biological weapons and disease.

I thank you.

