

INES statement to the Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Geneva, December 2012

Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a privilege and honour to be invited to make a statement to the Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), which I am doing on behalf of the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES).

Mr. Chairman,

As a network of engineers and scientists, we welcome the inclusion of the *Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention* as a Standing Agenda item (SAI) within this new inter-sessional process, as this is an area of special concern to us. We particularly appreciate the inclusion of both those developments that have potential benefits for the Convention and those that have potential uses contrary to the provisions of the Convention in that review. These are topics that also have relevance for the other two Standing Agenda items, Strengthening National Implementation and Cooperation and Assistance.

As shown in your synthesis paper of October 1, the Meeting of Experts 2012 identified a number of developments in science and technology in both categories that have relevance for the BWC. It also identified opportunities in regard to the implementation of codes of conduct and awareness-raising education for those involved in the life sciences and related fields. In addition, the Meeting of Experts identified possible measures for strengthening biological risk management in research and development. Furthermore, under the SAI on strengthening national implementation, the Meeting of Experts identified several measures relating to enhancing biosafety and biosecurity. These are all concrete suggestions for further consideration so as to promote common understandings and effective action at this present MSP.

Mr. Chairman,

Codes of conduct can be very useful in raising awareness about possible dual-use aspects of work in the life sciences and in helping to create a culture of responsibility among those directly involved in that work. However, this can only be realized if the individual is well informed of possible risks such as the inadvertent production of a novel dangerous biological agent while carrying out legitimate research. It has been well documented that there is a lack of awareness among the majority of those working in the life sciences about dual-use biosecurity issues. Codes of conduct will take on real effect only if dual-use biosecurity education has been provided; the two go hand-in-hand.

Relevant professional and scientific bodies have exerted a tremendous effort to develop and promote codes of conduct and biosecurity education programmes that can be adopted and applied. However, up to now, such programmes have not been implemented to the extent to where they can make a significant difference. Professional societies and academic associations cannot do the job alone. The requirement to implement such programmes simply has to come from the top as well as from the bottom, otherwise little progress will be made. It is governments that regulate and implement education programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

The effective action on this issue that is needed now is for the States Parties to the BWC to agree the importance of these education programmes for biosecurity and to undertake to implement them nationally, by bringing this to the attention of their governments. Governments can approach the appropriate education authorities to initiate the implementation process. One way forward would be for the education authorities to require that dual-use biosecurity education be integrated into already existing obligatory programmes addressing issues of biosafety and biosecurity. It is clear that dual-use biosecurity education of all those engaged in the life sciences and related fields is essential to achieve effective implementation of Article IV of the BWC.

The implementation of codes of conduct and biosecurity education would be effective *preventive* steps. However, further steps to mitigate biological risks through *risk management* are needed.

Mr. Chairman,

Risk management measures need not be over-regulatory or impede essential scientific progress in any way, especially if they are coupled to the implementation of biosecurity education. For example, the requirement of a dual-use risk assessment of the work to be performed *prior* to carrying it out would ensure that the scientist will put what has been learned through education into practice. A risk assessment of work using genetic engineering methods is required in many countries *before* the work can be carried out, to ensure that proper reflection about the consequences of the work to be performed has been made and adequate biosafety measures are in place.

In a similar manner, a risk assessment geared to dual-use work of concern can provide assurance that reflection will be made and that adequate means of dealing effectively with possible risks will be practiced, such as modification of the design of experiments or application of appropriate biosafety *and biosecurity* measures to meet the requirements of risk management.

Examples of such risk assessment questionnaires have been developed, which promote reflection on, rather than prohibition of, essential scientific work¹.

Mr. Chairman, INES is convinced that the implementation of such measures would greatly contribute to promoting scientific development while mitigating biological risks. We call upon the Meeting of States Parties to agree effective action on these measures as you are mandated to do by the Seventh Review Conference in 2011.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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¹http://www.cissm.umd.edu/papers/files/pathogens_project_monograph.pdf, p. 38;
http://oba.od.nih.gov/oba/biosecurity/documents/B_Dual_Use_Educational_Module_FINAL.pdf, p. 24;
<http://www.dual-usebioethics.net/>, Educational Module Resource, lecture 15, slide 20, p. 21.