

United States of America
Agenda Item 8: Strengthening National Implementation

Mister Chairman:

My delegation was very pleased that the Seventh Review Conference decided that measures were needed to address the current, highly uneven state of BWC implementation around the world, and created a standing agenda item on "strengthening national implementation."

In our Working Paper 5, submitted to the Meeting of Experts, the United States suggested several practical steps that BWC States Parties could take to strengthen national implementation. In particular, we called for:

Work to further elaborate existing "common understandings" about effective national implementation, to provide further guidance to relevant national authorities on recommended measures and possible approaches.

Steps to improve our collective understanding of the status of implementation around the world.

Prompt action to address needs and shortcomings, including through focused international cooperation efforts.

We identified practical efforts to strengthen biosafety and biosecurity around the world as a highly relevant and urgent subset of the national implementation agenda.

And we called for stronger ties to regional and subregional organizations and other regional efforts as a valuable means of strengthening implementation, based on our experience cooperating through the ASEAN Regional Forum.

We hope these proposals will find support.

We also hope the report of this meeting could reflect common understandings on the value of:

National biosecurity measures that include more than steps to guard against the theft of biomaterial from laboratories, and in particular the value of measures such as pre-suitability checks for prospective employees, ongoing personnel reliability and security awareness programs, and active outreach and engagement between the scientific and security communities.

Mr. Chairman, we support many of the recommendations contained in your synthesis paper. We must note, however, that no consensus exists that States Parties should work toward elaboration of a legally-binding instrument.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to note our support for several points raised in the NAM statement:

We strongly agree about the importance of international cooperation to strengthen implementation capacity. We urge States Parties to identify their needs -- or even to simply seek assistance in needs assessment -- and call on those in a position to do so to provide support. This is the heart of our national proposal and we are very pleased to see the support it commands from this important group.

We also agree with the principle that biodefense activities should not be used to mask offensive programs -- this would be a grave breach of the Convention.

Further, we agree on the importance of continued discussion in this forum -- among others -- of the challenges posed by the dual-use nature of much life science research. We were very pleased to co-host with the Netherlands a well-attended, substantive discussion of the H5N1 research issue at the Meeting of Experts, and welcome further dialogue.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to initiatives currently being advanced on peer review and compliance assessment: the NAM spokesman has rightly warned about the dangers of a false sense of security. That does not, in our view, mean that such initiatives should not be explored -- it means we must be realistic about their limitations. But increasing understanding of how States Parties implement their obligations is the core of both of these initiatives, and that cannot be a bad thing.