

**Eighth Review Conference of the States Parties  
to the Convention on the Prohibition of the  
Development, Production and Stockpiling  
of Bacteriological (Biological) and  
Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction**

25 April 2016

English only

**Preparatory Committee  
Geneva, 26-27 April and 8-12 August 2016  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda  
General exchange of views**

**Strengthening the BWC science and technology review  
process**

**Submitted by the Switzerland**


**Background**

1. In the context of the Eighth BWC Review Conference in November 2016 and its preparatory process, Switzerland proposes to reassess the way in which science and technology (S&T) developments are reviewed under the Convention.
2. Article XII of the Convention requests States Parties to “review the operation of the Convention” in a way that “shall take into account any new scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention”. In addition, the Seventh Review Conference mandated States Parties to “review developments in the field of science and technology” during the 2012-2015 intersessional programme, and decided that the Eighth Review Conference “should review the operation of the Convention, taking into account, inter alia, new scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention”.
3. An S&T review process that is both timely and effective is a complex undertaking with a long list of multifaceted scientific topics. In order to live up to the mandated task, Switzerland believes that a more systematic and sustainable examination of S&T developments and their bearings on the BWC is required. We need to go beyond the current practice of addressing the fundamentals and complexities of a multitude of scientific and technical issues solely in the framework of a policy process. Switzerland does not question the value of the intersessional process (ISP), but rather suggests re-organising the S&T review process in the framework of any type of future ISP in order to maximise its utility.
4. S&T developments are highly technical in nature, and so should be the process through which they are identified and their potential implications assessed. A technical process under the BWC dedicated to reviewing S&T developments will provide a more robust and comprehensive technical foundation on which to base our policy conclusions. Such a dedicated process would help to insulate technical discussions from policy considerations. The scientific assessment would then be fed into any type of future ISP and

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leave States Parties well placed for the resulting policy discussion, for instance in the framework of a standing S&T agenda item within the broader ISP.

5. Whatever is agreed by States Parties with respect to S&T review should be flexible enough to accommodate other decisions by States Parties, particularly those with respect to any type of future ISP, from the continuation of the current practice to its modification or replacement.

6. In an effort to foster this debate and contribute to our collective preparations for the Eighth Review Conference, Switzerland has identified parameters and considerations, each with a set of options, which it believes would shape any dedicated arrangement for reviewing S&T developments relevant to the BWC.<sup>1</sup>

7. This paper is intended as a basis for our deliberations on what features a dedicated S&T review process requires if it is to contribute to achieving the mandate set out in the Convention, and on how we could develop a process with these features. To this end, Switzerland will consult States Parties with a view to exchange opinions and identify common ground in the run-up to the Review Conference, and invites written feedback on the parameters and considerations contained in this paper by 30 June 2016..<sup>2</sup>

8. Based on the inputs received from States Parties, Switzerland intends to submit an updated version of this working paper and possibly additional documents for the second Preparatory Committee in August. We hope that a shared view on these parameters and considerations will enable us to identify what models and approaches would take them into account, and what a more effective and sustainable process would look like.<sup>3</sup> This will enable the Review Conference to agree on a suitable, standing arrangement – supported by adequate resources – for a timely, sustained and systematic review of S&T developments.

9. These informal consultations will of course provide the opportunity to discuss any other issue related to S&T review that States Parties wish to address, and we welcome and encourage States Parties' inputs.

## **Parameters and considerations**

### **General approach**

10. S&T developments to be reviewed are occurring at an increasing rate. To keep pace, a dedicated process would need to meet on a regular basis. These developments are complex and technical. It will be necessary for such efforts to be undertaken by qualified technical experts who are nominated by States Parties. Relevant expertise exists both inside and outside of governments and in public and private sectors. Accordingly, a flexible arrangement for bringing in appropriate expertise from pertinent sources, as and when required, will be important. Differences in opinion as to the relevance or potential impact of advances are to be expected and encouraged – as a result, an environment conducive to interaction and debate will be required. Separating the work of such a dedicated structure from the policy process of the intersessional work programme will help to provide such an environment. Conclusions and recommendations that come out of the dedicated review process should be geared towards informing and facilitating decisions of a political nature,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on working paper BWC/MSP/2015/MX/WP.11.

<sup>2</sup> States Parties are kindly asked to send their comments to Mr. Sergio Bonin, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, [sergio.bonin@eda.admin.ch](mailto:sergio.bonin@eda.admin.ch).

<sup>3</sup> To this end, States Parties may find it useful to consult working paper BWC/MSP/2015/WP.10 with examples and features of different international S&T review processes.

which for their part remain the sole prerogative of States Parties and the Meeting of States Parties.

### **Scope**

11. A dedicated structure could review advances in identified scientific fields or disciplines (e.g. immunology or systems biology). Alternatively, it could be tasked with focusing on specific implications (e.g. developments relevant for preventing disease such as vaccines, or in the aerosol delivery of biological agents). Either way, guidance as to what should be considered might come from different sources: States Parties could decide at the preceding Review Conference or Meeting of States Parties; technical experts involved in the process could propose or agree upon what to review; or some hybrid form could be considered, for example where the broad areas of focus are identified by States Parties but the details are filled in by the experts.

### **Group composition and costs**

12. The group's composition should be geographically diverse and representative. The number of experts participating in the process could be limited or left open to all States Parties wishing to participate. Resources will be required for such a dedicated review process but they need not be excessive. If individual States Parties nominate experts, then they might be responsible for all costs associated with their participation. A revised sponsorship programme might help ensure broadly representative participation, and that the widest possible range of States Parties is in a position to nominate experts. Another option might include the creation of a dedicated fund with voluntary or other forms of contributions. Alternatively, such a dedicated structure could be funded through assessed contributions. Following standard practice in scientific and technical meetings, a single common language could be used, significantly decreasing interpretation and translation costs.

### **Guidance and coordination**

13. A dedicated expert body could not operate in isolation but would require constant oversight, guidance and support from States Parties, including the definition of its methods of work. At a strategic level, a facilitator or vice-president might provide overarching, continuous coordination and a link through to the broader work of the Convention. This individual might be elected by States Parties at the preceding Review Conference or Meeting of States Parties for the entire duration of the next intersessional work programme or for a shorter duration. Alternatively, the process, or each meeting held under it, could have its own chair, chosen by States Parties or from amongst the experts using some form of consensus mechanism or election. It is essential that the Chair has the capacity to organise and conduct discussions of a scientific and technical nature. Again, a hybrid model could be considered where there is both a facilitator chosen by States Parties and a chair elected by the experts. The ISU might provide the necessary administrative and substantive support providing a Secretary for the group and perhaps also taking on the role of rapporteur helping to capture and distil technical discussions.

### **Input**

14. Given the breadth of S&T developments of potential relevance to the Convention, no single state, organization, or field of expertise would be able to offer all the knowledge and experience necessary to assess their implications fully. As a result, necessary expertise will need to be drafted in from different sources and various regions, ensuring broad representation. On the other hand, there is a core set of skills and experiences that is likely needed regularly. Having a core group of national experts supplemented as necessary might

balance the needs for continuity and flexibility. International scientific organizations familiar to States Parties and with a long-standing history of engagement on these issues might be invited by States Parties as guests to the core group on a standing or ad-hoc basis. Depending on the topics being considered, additional contributions from other scientific bodies or individual experts might be requested on a case-by-case basis. Such contributions might take the form of requested papers or presentations. Invitations to provide such inputs might be made by States Parties (at the preceding Review Conference or Meeting of States Parties), by the core group of experts, or by the facilitator or chair.

### **Reporting**

15. As the aim of a dedicated S&T review body is to help States Parties in taking decisions and shaping the future of the Convention, a reliable mechanism will be needed to feed the output of the experts' work into the policy process. Such a reporting mechanism would need to be regular and targeted to the needs of States Parties. A report might capture the views of experts, representing diversities of opinion. On the other hand, it could be purely factual, avoiding expert opinion all together and focusing on consensus evidence. In format, a report might be exhaustive, listing all the relevant references and discussions, or consolidated, providing a sense of the debates but presented in a shorter, less technical and more policy-friendly manner. The report produced by the experts will need to include scientific findings where consensus exists, and might make recommendations based upon the technical discussions. The experts might also offer guidance on the classification or priority of the issues they examined. Such a step would be critical for translating the technical reviews into actionable policy and, whilst not binding on States Parties, help focus our policy discussions. To this end, the report will be addressed to any pertinent body under the future ISP. The annual Meetings of States Parties, for instance, might consider the report of the expert body and make policy recommendations. For its part, the Review Conference might decide upon any necessary action of a broader nature.

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