



Standardise Biosecurity

Statement of Pax Christi International to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Meeting of Experts: 12-16 August 2013, Geneva

Madame Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you during your Meeting of Experts seeking to strengthen the norm against misuse of the life sciences for hostile purposes. Pax Christi International is a Catholic Peace Movement inspired by Catholic Social Teaching. We strongly believe that international treaties, including the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), are essential instruments for protecting human life and dignity anywhere in the world. We are convinced that your work should ultimately contribute to human security and respect for human rights for everyone. We wish to make some concrete suggestions of direct relevance to this Meeting.

The topical scientific subject on your agenda to be addressed under your Standing Agenda item on Science and Technology for 2013 is “advances in technologies for surveillance, detection, diagnosis and mitigation of infectious diseases, and similar occurrences caused by toxins in humans, animals and plants”. We recognise that consideration of this topical subject is equally relevant to your Standing Agenda item on cooperation and assistance and in this regard, we bring to your attention some recent activities of the *Physics for Development* working group of the European Physical Society¹ and the UNESCO International Centre for Theoretical Physics “Abu Salam”² in building capacity for physics experiments at universities in developing countries. Topics of interest include cheap diagnostics and other healthcare technologies. Physics may not commonly generally be considered a life science, but it is a key discipline in development of diagnostics and other biosecurity enhancing technologies. We would encourage you to establish working relations with these and other relevant scientific organisations.

Furthermore, we welcome the aim of the Chairman to bring in more voices in the intersessional process, in particular encouraging increased active participation by more States Parties. However, we are concerned that the necessary resources for international cooperation and assistance may be lacking, and encourage States Parties to increase their sponsorship for relevant initiatives.

Pax Christi International is pleased about the prominent role given to discussions on scientific and technological developments related to the Convention, and supports the Chairman’s call to bring in more voices by continuing efforts to engage the scientific community, academia, industry and relevant Non-Governmental Organisations. However, we are concerned about recent reports by the Implementation Support Unit indicating that insufficient resources may be available for ensuring a proper monitoring quality. This shortfall is especially regretted as we note that, in regard to convergence of scientific disciplines, monitoring relevant trends in science and technology is also on the agenda of other international bodies including the Scientific Advisory Board of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

¹ <http://www.epsphysicsfordevelopment.org/>

² <http://www.ictp.it/>

We recommend improving the existing collaborations between the Implementation Support Unit and these bodies by establishing a common online observatory to study the state of the art of converging disciplines, focused on dual use areas. In this observatory, selected scientific literature, validated experts profiles, relevant news items and briefing documents explaining the state of the art to diplomats and other lay persons can be stored and easily retrieved by academia, industry, international organisations, States Parties to the relevant treaties and other stakeholders.

Biosecurity of laboratory infrastructure could be improved through common standards and certification, such as the Implementation Support Unit³ norms for medical laboratories and the Laboratory Bio Management: Strategic Framework for Action 2012-2016 of the World Health Organisation.⁴ Pax Christi International calls for sponsorship or other measures enabling developing countries to participate fully in the development and implementation of such standardisation activities, rather than merely being encouraged to implement standards agreed by others.

Continuous training of scientists as well as biosafety officers is necessary to ensure local implementation of the BTWC convention. This is the more pressing in interdisciplinary research activities where scientists handling dual use biological materials may not have learned about biosafety procedures in their basic training. Pax Christi International recommends inclusion of best practices in the abovementioned observatory or other central resource to facilitate mutual learning.

Pax Christi International calls for more commitment by the State Parties of the BTWC in participating in, submitting and developing of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). This is a key tool for the Convention! We would like to remind the States Parties at the Meeting of Experts that 2013 is the second and final year of the CBMs agenda item: therefore we recommend that they should agree some means of ensuring continuing attention to CBMs after 2013, is needed. Otherwise there will be an unfortunate gap until the subject is picked up again at the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. For example, the topic of CBMs might be allocated to one of the Vice-Chairmen, who would be tasked with reporting on CBM progress to the Meeting of States Parties 2014 and 2015, in much the same way as a report is given each year on progress in universalization. It would be even better if the Meeting of Experts could recommend to the Meeting of States Parties 2013 that space be made in the second half of the intersessional programme (2014 and 2015) for preparatory work aimed at making the substantive discussion of the future of CBMs more productive at the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. For example, an Ad Hoc Group of Experts (as in 1987 when one such followed the Second Review Conference) could concentrate on the future of CBMs if appointed by the Meeting of States Parties 2013 to work through 2014 and 2015 and submit a report with specific proposals for consideration at the Eighth Review Conference. It is also very vital that the Implementation Support Unit has sufficient resources to be able to track and study the reports.

Thank you for your attention. Pax Christi International wishes you all fruitful discussions and a successful Meeting of States Parties Experts.

Geneva, 12 August 2013

³ International Organisation for Standardisation www.iso.org

⁴ http://www.who.int/ihr/publications/strategic_framework/en/