



Integrate Biosecurity in Global Healthcare

Statement of Pax Christi International to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties

1-5 December 2014, Geneva

Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you during your Meeting of States Parties. We wish to make some concrete proposals of direct relevance to this Meeting.

Strengthening implementation of Article VII

The new biennial topic for 2014 and 2015 on strengthening Article VII includes consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties. The Meeting of Experts in August 2014 started discussions about strengthening mutual cooperation and assistance in case the Security Council decides that another State Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention. At the same time, the natural Ebola outbreak in some African countries demonstrated the flagrant inability of the international community to protect citizens in these countries against infectious diseases and severe disruptive effects on the society as a whole. Even though the causes of the Ebola outbreak are of natural origin rather than human-made, this outbreak can also be considered as a test case for the procedures and mechanisms devised for strengthening implementation of Article VII of the BTWC. More importantly, it highlights the need for an integrated, effective, transparent and affordable Global Health Regime that pools all available resources rather than separate arrangements and budgets under different international conventions and agreements.

Relevant developments in science and technology

The particular topic to be considered in 2014 under the Standing Agenda item on Science and Technology is “advances in the understanding of pathogenicity, virulence, toxicology, immunology and related issues”. The Synthesis document submitted by the Chairman¹ lists the trends discussed during the Meeting of Experts last August and highlights in particular the issue of “gain of function research”² that has given rise to much controversy in recent years in several countries. Pax Christi International would favour a common international approach to this and other Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC) rather than a fragmented plethora of national initiatives in some States Parties to the Convention. This Meeting of States Parties offers the appropriate platform for such a coordinated effort.

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[http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/31F319F82453F4C6C1257D720032593E/\\$file/Chairman+Letter+to+States+Parties+signed+version+for+website.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/31F319F82453F4C6C1257D720032593E/$file/Chairman+Letter+to+States+Parties+signed+version+for+website.pdf)

² “Gain of function research” refers to scientific investigations that increase the hazardous characteristics of pathogenic micro-organisms, presumably in order to be able to develop more effective therapies and counter-measures.

The capacity to handle the review of relevant Scientific and Technological developments should be strengthened by creating the proposed “Open Ended Working Group” that was nearly achieved at the Seventh Review Conference. Now it is a Swiss proposal and at the Meeting of Experts 1-4 August 2014 it gained support from States Parties including Australia, the Netherlands and the UK. Pax Christi International urges the adoption during the present Meeting of States Parties of this proposal as an Effective Action recommended to the Eighth Review Conference.

More generally, Pax Christi International would like to reiterate its call for the creation of a more structured common multidisciplinary global Observatory on developments in science and technology of relevance to the BTWC Convention as well as the CWC Convention, UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other related international agreements. Such an Observatory could act as a clearing house of information on recent publications as well as research strategies and future scenarios and interpret their relevance to the legislative process as well as human security of citizens of States Parties and protection of global biodiversity. The monitoring activities of the BioWeapons Prevention Project could become an element of such an Observatory.³

Cooperation and assistance (in particular regarding article X)

In addition, such an Observatory could be useful beyond the narrow interest of protecting citizens against biological and chemical weapons by contributing to the broader goal of fostering worldwide peaceful and sustainable cooperation in life sciences. This would require coordination with ongoing work at UNESCO on reviewing the Declaration on the Status of Scientific Researchers (1974). In November 2013, the General Conference adopted a Resolution saying that this declaration should be revised. This requires the Director General of UNESCO to prepare this revision in consultation with Member States and other stakeholders during the period 2014-2017. Hence, UNESCO has opened a stakeholder consultation in multiple stages; the next one will be open between 15 February and 15 July 2015.⁴ Pax Christi International reiterates its plea to invite those engaged in this UNESCO consultation to future meetings of the BTWC to stimulate synergies in the international dialogues about ethics and security in life sciences and converging technologies.

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

Geneva, 1 December 2014.

About Us

Pax Christi International is a Catholic Peace Movement inspired by Catholic Social Teaching. We strongly believe that the body of international law and international humanitarian law is essential for promoting global peace, justice and integrity of creation. The BTWC is an integral part of this legal framework that should contribute to human security, respect for human rights and sustainability while avoiding imposition of unnecessary or duplicate regulatory burdens.

³ www.bwpp.org

⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/bioethics/call-for-advice-revision-of-unesco-recommendation-on-the-status-of-scientific-researchers/>