



Engage Citizens in Biosecurity

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

10-14 August 2015, Geneva

Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you during your Meeting of Experts. We wish to make some concrete proposals of direct relevance to this Meeting. Our suggestions are relevant to two items on your agenda: **Cooperation and assistance, in particular regarding article X**, and **Review of developments in science and technology**.

Concerning article X, your Programme of Work features discussion about "Education, training, exchange and twinning programmes and other means of developing human resources in the biological sciences and technology relevant to the implementation of the Convention, particularly in developing countries". Developments in Massive Open Online Courses¹ for higher education could offer a solution in the form of access to high quality education to anyone with internet access anywhere in the world at affordable costs. While relevant courses in biosecurity and biosafety are already being offered, it is not always easy to identify good quality courses that are relevant to local circumstances anywhere in the world. We would urge the participating experts to work with the Implementation Support Unit to the Convention in compiling an online clearing house as part of the public section of the Cooperation and Assistance Database for high quality courses in as many languages as possible, featuring lectures from all over the world. In addition, the States Parties could offer incentives to the scientific community to develop new courses or translate successful ones thereby contributing to the development of human resources in non-English speaking countries. A good practice example is the Educational Module Resource offered by the University of Bradford, available in English, Spanish, French, Russian, Urdu and other languages.²

Concerning recent developments in science and technology, your agenda includes consideration of measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists, academia and industry, as well as education and awareness raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology. Pax Christi International would like to plead for increased effective action in raising awareness of ordinary citizens especially in developing countries about the potential benefits and risks of life sciences for their well-being. In this respect, we would like to remind the participating representatives of States Parties and experts of the recent trends in open science, or citizen science. The wide dissemination of enabling technologies allows the women and men in the street to participate in the scientific enterprise. Consider for example

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course

² <http://www.brad.ac.uk/bioethics/educationalmoduleresource/englishlanguageversionofemr/>

the Big Flu Measurement in the Netherlands and Belgium, where volunteers can register the appearance of influenza since 2003. By now, this has broadened to InfluenzaNet³ in ten European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom).

To conclude, we would like to recall that Pax Christi International's engagement has been since around 2001 with your meetings about the BTWC convention. Some other participants have asked us why we have been making such a prolonged effort. About 15 years ago, the Permanent Observer for the Holy See to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva, Mgr. Diarmuid Martin,⁴ asked Pax Christi International to join the work on the BTWC as an NGO. Around that time, a voluntary working group in the Dutch section of Pax Christi was also preparing a position statement for the Fifth Review conference. Since then, the engagement has been kept alive by a small group of enthusiastic volunteers in close cooperation with the other NGOs cooperating in the BioWeapons Prevention Project. What motivates us is Catholic Social Teaching, calling upon all people of good will to contribute to Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation. The BTWC is an integral part of the international legal framework that should contribute to human security and respect for human rights while avoiding imposition of unnecessary or duplicate regulatory burdens.

Knowing that you have a busy schedule this week, we will limit ourselves to these recommendations. Thank you for your attention. Pax Christi International wishes you all fruitful discussions and a successful Meeting of Experts.

Geneva, 10 August 2015

³ <https://www.influenza.net.eu/>

⁴ He is currently Archbishop of Dublin in Ireland.