



**Statement to the UN General Assembly First Committee  
on Disarmament and International Security  
New York  
10 October 2017**

Delivered by Marie Chevrier  
on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project and partners

Mr. Chair,

Disease, especially deliberate disease, poses a major risk to international security and could cost countless lives. The public health emergencies connected to the outbreaks of the ebola and zika viruses have demonstrated that incidents of infectious disease—whether natural, accidental or deliberate—have an impact that straddles humanitarian, global health, international security, development and economic dimensions. The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) plays a key role in ensuring that humanity does not use pathogens or toxins as a weapon.

In the lead up to the BWC Eighth Review Conference last year, there were high hopes that States Parties would “*make full use of the opportunity presented by the Review Conference to ensure that the BWC meets the needs and challenges of the modern world*”. Unfortunately, that opportunity was squandered. The Review Conference ended without agreement on any initiatives: to help keep pace with, and respond to, rapid scientific change and advances; improve responses to the use of a biological weapon; enhance the treaty’s implementation; or examine complementary compliance measures. The intersessional work programme was weakened, not strengthened. There was no agreement on how to use the interval between Review Conferences more effectively and productively.

The treaty’s problems spilled over into this year. The failure to confirm a Chair for this year’s Meeting of State Parties (MSP) until 4 September – a mere three months before the start of the 2017 meeting in December – means that much critical preparation time has already been lost.

Nevertheless, the forthcoming MSP allows for a course correction to put things back on the right path. The Eighth Review Conference decided that the 2017 MSP would “*seek to make progress on issues of substance and process for the period before the next Review Conference, with a view to reaching consensus on an intersessional process.*” To do so will require strong leadership from the Chair and true political and financial commitment from States Parties. We, the network members of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) and our partners, therefore call upon States Parties to work diligently in the run-up to, and during, the MSP to achieve this goal. We support a number of proposals on substance and process that were discussed during the Eighth Review Conference and believe that these remain key to an effective treaty suited to the challenges of the modern era.

Firstly, all States Parties should see value in a better mechanism for considering developments in science and technology. These developments are relevant to the full scope of the Convention, from what it prohibits in Articles I, III and IV, through investigating and responding to biological weapons use (Articles V, VI, and VII), to facilitating peaceful uses of science (Article X). We recognise that the outcomes of review conferences require a delicate balance between competing objectives but science and technology affects them all. Progress on strengthening the science review process



should not be linked to progress in other areas and should be achievable as a stand alone outcome in December.

Secondly, a renewed intersessional programme should provide the opportunity to reexamine and improve the means of reassurance and compliance with the Convention. The BWC currently relies on a raft of disparate and largely ineffective compliance tools. States Parties should start afresh on this issue and explore the efficacy of the different approaches already implemented by some of their number.

Regarding process, States Parties should seek to ensure that the interval between Review Conferences is used more effectively and productively. The intersessional process of the past has become largely stagnant; a number of states, NGOs and other stakeholders are rightly frustrated at the inability to take decisions or pursue effective action. States Parties could restructure this process by replacing the annual BWC Meeting of Experts with specific Working Groups or processes on key issues including science and technology, cooperation and assistance under Article VII, reassurance concerning implementation of the convention and enhancing the effectiveness of Confidence-Building Measures. We have outlined some options in an additional paper available on the BWPP's website (BWPP, "*Reflections*" in *Report from Geneva: Key objectives for an effective Eighth Review Conference*, 12 October 2016, online at <http://www.bwpp.org/documents.html>).

Lastly, more resources are needed to fulfill the Convention's objectives. While we welcome the payments made to date, as of the end of August 2017, States Parties owe the BWC almost \$321,000 USD for past conferences. In addition, over \$542,000 remains outstanding for 2017 alone. This threatens the treaty's ability to convene meetings and the treaty's Institutional Support Unit's ability to fulfill its mandate. The BWC cannot endure on good intentions alone. Each State Party must take their financial obligation seriously. Every state must ensure assessed contributions are paid in a timely fashion and that arrears are paid in full.

Mr. Chair,

Make no mistake: this will be hard. States Parties will need to agree in one week what could not be earlier agreed in three. Preparations will need to be fast-tracked—even while the First Committee is in session. Financial implications will play a major role in what can practicably be agreed. We call upon States Parties to come to the table prepared and ready to make progress. Should attempts to reach a consensus stagnate, other procedural options for decision-making should be explored. The BWC is the bastion of efforts against the malign use of the life sciences and an integral part of the legal architecture against the use of weapons of mass destruction. We cannot afford to fail in our global efforts to protect the world from biological and toxin weapons.

Thank you.

This statement and a list of endorsements is available online at [www.bwpp.org/documents](http://www.bwpp.org/documents)  
A list of BWPP network members is available at: [www.bwpp.org/network.html](http://www.bwpp.org/network.html)

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*The BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) is a global network of civil society actors dedicated to the permanent elimination of biological weapons and of the possibility of their re-emergence.*  
<http://www.bwpp.org>