



Permanent Representation
of the Federal Republic of Germany
to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva

General Statement

by

H.E. Ambassador Michael Biontino

Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 26-27 April 2016

FIRST MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR
THE EIGHTH BTWC REVIEW CONFERENCE

Mr Chairman,

I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairman and pledge our full support. I am confident that under your able leadership we can move forward and agree upon a meaningful outcome of the Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman, Germany aligns itself with the Statement (made or to be held) on behalf of the European Union. Nonetheless, I would like to highlight and share a few reflections of importance to the German delegation:

2016 is an important year for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. The Review Conference can set the course for future activities and a more effective implementation of the Convention at national and international level. It is yet again a unique opportunity to reflect and agree upon ways and means to make the Convention work. This is our joint responsibility.

First, there is the need to further increase the membership of the Convention and make a joint effort to convince states not party of the benefits. This can only be achieved if the Convention is perceived as a meaningful security policy instrument.

Second, the question of developments in the field of biotechnology and the potential risk that terrorists might consider abusing of highly toxic and infectious biological agents are challenges which need to be tackled without delay. Therefore, standstill is not an option for the BTWC-process.

We need to make full use of the Eighth Review Conference in order to achieve further progress. We should overcome differences in the common interest of a more effective implementation of the Convention.

In this context, it is in our view crucial that NGOs, experts and scientists will have the opportunity to participate in the upcoming Review Conference, as has been established practice at all previous review conferences.

In our view, twofold efforts are necessary in order to ensure that the BTWC remains a dynamic and effective instrument for preventing the use of biological weapons:

First, structural changes are an issue:

The current intersessional process lacks timely and effective decision-making procedures. Existing structures and institutions require reinforcement.

- Without an appropriate and carefully defined degree of decision-making authority for the MSP, we will not be able to foster a more effective implementation over the next five years.

- The annual meeting of experts should be adapted into a format that is capable of reacting to rapid and complex developments in life sciences in order to make useful recommendations to State Parties.

- We need to ensure that the ISU's mandate, resources and staffing correspond appropriately to any decision we all might wish to agree upon for the intersessional period.

- To achieve progress in key BTWC areas, we support the principle of establishing working groups as has been proposed by a number of states. Topics for these working groups could include confidence-building and transparency measures; national implementation and compliance; the strengthening of investigation capacities and assistance; science and technology; Articles VII and X; and, last but not least, efforts to promote the universality of the BTWC.

Second, discussing the establishment of working groups reinforces the fact that there is a clear link between effective structures and progress on substance.

There are a number of substantive issues on which Germany intends to make a contribution:

Firstly, Germany attaches particular importance to national implementation, including confidence-building measures (CBMs) as an instrument for enhancing transparency and demonstrating compliance with the Convention. We therefore support measures aimed at increasing the quantity, quality and relevance of all CBMs. We place great emphasis on making the CBM process as effective as possible, and we hope that progress can be achieved at the RevCon.

Secondly, in order to strengthen confidence in the implementation of the BTWC, Germany supports further development of the Peer Review Process, building on activities undertaken to date. In this regard, Germany intends to invite all BTWC member states to a compliance visit in August 2016. A defence research facility, dealing with pathogens relevant to the BTWC, shall serve as a model facility to be visited. We are looking forward to be able to send the invitations to all member states within the next days. Germany will be grateful to receive many replies by member states.

Germany is fully aware that such a visit and the continuation of the peer review process cannot and should not be a replacement for full-fledged verification. However, we are convinced that it can serve as a useful tool until such verification may be achieved.

Thirdly, Germany will make further efforts to strengthen the UN Secretary General's Mechanism. We welcome the encouragement of close cooperation among laboratories and specialists, and efforts to enhance the exchange of best practices and lessons learned. We also advocate strengthening UNODA's role in steering and coordinating activities in this area and encourage other delegations to do the same.

We are looking forward to active and constructive discussions on these important issues during the preparatory phase.

I firmly believe that close cooperation, a frank and constructive exchange of views and a spirit of compromise will enable us to take this very important Convention forward.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Thank you.

Mr President