

**Research Group for
Biological Arms Control**



Statement by the

Research Group for Biological Arms Control

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Centre for Science and
Peace Research at the University of Hamburg, Germany

to the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and
Toxin Weapons Convention

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Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker-
Centre for Science
and Peace Research

Mr President, Distinguished Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I make this statement on behalf of the Research Group for Biological Arms Control at the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Centre for Science and Peace Research at the University of Hamburg in Germany. The mission of our Research Group is to contribute, through innovative research and outreach activities, to the universal prevention of biological weapons development, production and use.

Our activities have two main focuses: First, we work to prevent the erosion of the universal bioweapons prohibition by opposing activities that violate treaty obligations. Second, we develop new concepts and instruments to monitor activities relevant to bioweapons, and to verify and enforce compliance with the regulations against them.

Mr President,

Looking at key figures of the BWC regime could lead one to believe that the global treaty regime for the ban of bioweapons is on a good way. For example membership is constantly growing, and the participation in the CBM mechanism has reached an all-time high with 80 submissions by 1st November. Thirty-one of the states who have submitted a CBM have also decided to use the CBM mechanism not only as an inter-state transparency mechanism, but to actively promote public transparency by releasing their CBM to the general public on the ISU website.

The view that these figures indicate that the BWC is in good shape is, however, rather naïve and lacks nuance. The participation in the only official information mechanism which is constantly in use can still not be considered satisfactory. Outside of some geographical hotspots too few states submit CBMs regularly. As in previous years, the Research Group for Biological Arms Control has summarized the information of the publicly available CBMs in a reader, which is available at the door.

And universalization still stumbles especially in the region where in 2014 the Syrian ricin programme came to light.

Mr. President,

Although there is broad consensus that rapid developments in the life sciences might increase the potential for misuse in biological weapons programmes, the treaty remains without an effective mechanism to learn about new threats

and to adapt to them. To make the BWC future-proof, States Parties have to decide now on the establishment of an independent advisory body. Ideally, This body would not be limited to in-depth technology advice, but would also have the capacity for an interdisciplinary monitoring of activities with relevance for both the prohibitive regulations and the promotion of technical cooperation.

Mr President,

While an SAB or an equivalent infrastructure would inform the regime about upcoming trends, confidence in compliance is built by knowledge about actual activities. Hence, the major weakness of the regime is its missing ability to gather and analyse information in a verification procedure. While we do not dare hope for the decision to resume negotiations towards such a mechanism on this conference, we would still like to stress the possibilities to gather relevant information from open sources. While a civil society mechanism could by no means replace a political instrument, such information can still contribute to an informed debate. To this end we have developed a web tool for the structured gathering and visualisation of open source information. On a side event this morning we have launched that online database, containing BWC relevant information from open sources. The database can be accessed at www.bwpp.org/monitor.

Mr President,

In the past fifteen years, we have seen a political standstill within the regime. At the same time we have also witnessed the failure of realpolitik in many other global political fields. Preventive biological arms control is another area where the assertion of particular national interests cannot effectively support the aim of the regime, but would even put the functionality of this outstanding treaty in danger. We urge the Member States of the BWC to strengthen a true multilateral approach instead. Please make the BWC a vital, flexible and knowledgeable regime, and provide it with the institutional infrastructure for effective implementation.

I thank you for your attention.