



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 Meeting of the States Parties to the
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

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Mr. Chairman, 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. The focus of our activities is twofold. Firstly, we contribute to preventing the erosion of the universal bioweapons prohibition by opposing norm-harming activities. Secondly, we develop new concepts and instruments for monitoring bioweapon relevant activities and for verifying and enforcing compliance with the norm against bioweapons.

While the important topic of this year's BWC meetings is assistance in the case of alleged use of biological weapons including improving public health capabilities, many here in the room are thinking about other BWC-related issues also. With the Seventh Review Conference of the BWC only one year away and only one week of official meetings during the PrepCom, this is hardly surprising. We would like to add our views on what should be addressed in December 2011.

In our view, the most important issue to be attended to is how to increase transparency around treaty-relevant activities. Only a sufficient level of transparency will put the BWC in a position to function effectively and be of continued relevance. Why is this such an important point? In order to influence the behaviour of states, actors must have information about the activities they want to influence. In the case of the BWC this means that if the international community wants to influence how the life sciences are being used, states and non-governmental actors first of all must have information about life science activities around the globe. Where accurate and timely information is missing it becomes difficult to assess states' compliance with the established norms.

In other words, transparency is the precondition for compliance checking, an activity which is also known as verification. Collecting relevant data, and turning these data into useful information allows reasonable compliance judgements to be made. Data can be collected through a number of means, for instance official declarations by states, analysis of open sources by states, international organisations or NGOs, or on-site inspections. Turning data into useful information might require fora for presenting and explaining ones own data, and for asking questions about other actors' data.

A lack of transparency not only hampers verification, it also impedes assessing the overall effectiveness of the BWC, and decisions on its evolution.

Transparency is not only indispensable for the well-being of the BWC, it is also inevitable. The high degree of

relevant activities by non-governmental actors such as private industry and academia, coupled with the strong dynamic of the life sciences make it difficult to keep data restricted or secret. Moreover, if secret activities do leak out, embarrassment, at least, and at worst distrust is pre-programmed. Recent events have shown that keeping things secret is never a safe bet.

Transparency refers to the availability of relevant information. However, it is highly complicated to define what information is of relevance for the BWC in the large and diverse mass of life science activities. The life sciences continue to be in a very dynamic stage of their development. No other technology area of weapons relevance is currently so unordered and in flux. Clearly we need both, broad illumination of life science activities in order to establish the context in which particular activities are taking place, and spotlights on activities that can easily be misinterpreted and misused.

Consequently, transparency should be a guiding principle for biological arms control. Within the BWC regime States Parties took a first step towards more transparency in 1986, when they agreed an information exchange mechanism, the confidence building measures. The CBMs are an important source of treaty-relevant information, and we applaud those states which have started discussions on CBM improvement in preparation for the next Review Conference. Our Research Group tries to support the improvement of the CBM mechanism by annually analysing the CBM submissions that have been released to the public. The latest analysis – our 2010 CBM Reader on Publicly Available CBMs – is available at the door. Interestingly, more countries than ever before have made their CBMs available to the public this year. In preparing for the Seventh BWC Review Conference, the CBMs will be one of our foci.

There are, however, many other sources of relevant data, which, if used, could increase transparency in treaty-relevant activities further. One example are public databases that contain trade data collected by customs officers worldwide. Our Research Group has developed a trade monitoring concept that, if implemented, would increase transparency in the transfer of biological dual use goods globally. We look forward to discuss details of this proposal with a number of experts in this room in the run-up to the Seventh BWC Review Conference.

We know that there are many areas in which the Seventh BWC Review Conference can and should make progress. Transparency, we believe, should be high up on the agenda.

I thank you for your attention!