

MEETING OF STATES PARTIES TO THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION CONCLUDES

States parties agree on the value of supporting and improving national and international measures against infectious and deliberate diseases

13 December 2004

The 2004 Meeting of States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (commonly known as the Biological Weapons Convention, or BWC) concluded on 10 December, with the 89 participating States parties agreeing on a final document highlighting the value of national and international efforts to combat infectious and deliberate diseases.

The Meeting of States parties, chaired by Peter Goosen of South Africa, further developed the work begun at the Meeting of Experts, held from 19 to 30 July this year, on two topics: (1) strengthening and broadening national and international institutional efforts and existing mechanisms for the surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious diseases affecting humans, animals, and plants; and (2) enhancing international capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease.

On the first topic, the States parties recognised that infectious disease outbreaks can be contained and suppressed through early detection, immediate response and co-operation and support at the national and international level; that strengthening and broadening national and international surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious disease may support the object and purpose of the Convention; that the primary responsibility for surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious diseases rests with States parties, while the (World Health Organization (WHO)), the (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)) and the (World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)) have global responsibilities, within their mandates, in this regard, and that the respective structures, planning and activities of States parties and the WHO, FAO and OIE should be co-ordinated with and complement one another; and that scientific and technological developments have the potential to significantly improve disease surveillance and response.

The States parties consequently agreed on the value of: supporting the existing networks of relevant international organisations for the surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious diseases and acting to strengthen the WHO, FAO and OIE programmes, within their mandates, for the continued development and strengthening of, and research into, rapid, effective and reliable activities for the surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious diseases, including in cases of emergencies of international concern; of improving, wherever possible, national and regional disease surveillance capabilities, and, if in a position to do so, assisting and encouraging, with the necessary agreement, other States Parties to do the same; and of working to improve communication on disease surveillance, including with the WHO, FAO and OIE, and among States Parties.

On the second topic, the States Parties recognised that capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease promote the object and purpose of the Convention; that States Parties' national preparedness and arrangements substantially contribute to international capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease; and that the Secretary-General's investigation mechanism, set out in A/44/561 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution A/Res/45/57, represents an international institutional mechanism for investigating cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons.

The States parties consequently agreed on the value of: continuing to develop their own national capacities for response, investigation and mitigation, in cooperation with the relevant international and regional organisations, and, if in a position to do so, assisting and encouraging, with the necessary agreement, other States parties to do the same; and of the Sixth Review Conference considering, among other things, the further development of current procedures for the provision of assistance, by those in a position to do so, to States parties in cases of alleged use of biological weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease

Moreover, the Meeting encouraged States parties to inform the forthcoming Sixth Review Conference (due to be held in 2006) of, among other things, any actions, measures or other steps that they may have taken on the basis of the discussions at the 2004 Meeting of Experts and of the outcome of the 2004 Meeting of States parties.

The 2004 Meeting of States parties was part of a three-year programme mandated by the Fifth Review Conference

of the BWC. The Review Conference, which concluded in 2002, decided that States parties would meet twice yearly until the next Review Conference in 2006 to "to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on" specific topics related to better implementation of the BWC. In 2005, the Meeting of Experts (13 to 24 June) and the Meeting of States parties (5 to 9 December) will consider the content, promulgation, and adoption of codes of conduct for scientists. States parties to the BWC are due to meet in 2006 for the Sixth Review Conference to review the operation of the Convention, with a view to assuring that the provisions of the Convention are being properly and effectively implemented.

The Biological Weapons Convention, which opened for signature in 1972 and entered into force in 1975, is the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons. It currently has 153 States Parties, with a further 16 having signed but not yet ratified.

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