

## **Working Paper by Norway**

### **Support unit for the BTWC**

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) has set a global norm. While there is broad consensus on the need to further consolidate this important treaty, there are different views on how to move forward.

The Review Conference will consider proposals for strengthening national implementation, universalisation, assistance, confidence-building and preventive measures, and the process leading up to the next Review Conference, which could take the form of an agreed programme of work.

A programme of work for the next five years would need the support of a secretariat. So far, the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) has fulfilled this task. While there is a widespread satisfaction with the DDA's performance, there are constraints on the resources it can set aside for servicing the BTWC community.

The BTWC and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) both prohibit weapons of mass destruction. Yet the way these two conventions operate is very different. The CWC has a comprehensive programme of work and an implementation support structure, such as its own organisation with a large secretariat. In comparison, the BTWC suffers from a serious institutional deficit.

The establishment of an organisation for the BTWC is not a topic for discussion, and neither would there be consensus on setting up a large secretariat for the BTWC. A mechanism has to be found that can support States Parties in fulfilling their BTWC commitments without entailing additional financial obligations.

These concerns have been accommodated in other arms control treaties. For example, a small implementation support unit has been developed under the Mine Ban Treaty, and has already proven its added value.

A support unit under the BTWC could cover the following tasks:

- Being in charge of the preparations for intergovernmental meetings.
- Receiving the States Parties' Confidence Building Measures reports. Encouraging and reminding States Parties to submit such reports on an annual basis, and, if necessary, providing assistance. Disseminating Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to other the States Parties.
- Drawing up an annual report on the CBMs for the States Parties.
- Functioning as a clearing house for technical cooperation on legislation, biosafety and biosecurity without duplicating other relevant institutions. The unit could also facilitate technical cooperation between the States Parties at their request, such as elaborations of project proposals.

- Working systematically towards full universalisation of the BTWC.
- Maintaining regular contact with key institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).
- Providing support to the UN Secretary General in the event of a suspicious outbreak of disease, by up-dating the Secretary General's response mechanism.
- Facilitating consultations between States Parties in cases where article V has been invoked.

Such a support unit could be located within the UN DDA, but not funded over the UN regular budget. The financing of such a unit should be explored at the Review Conference.

The composition of the unit should ensure a high level of competence and be balanced in terms of geographical diversity and gender. At the same time the unit must be lean and cost-effective.

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