

Seventh Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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Summary record (partial)* of the 1st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 5 December 2011, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. Sareva (Director, Geneva Branch of the United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs)

President: Mr. van den IJssel..... (Netherlands)

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* In accordance with rule 42 of the rules of procedure of the Conference, no summary records were prepared for meetings, or parts of meetings, devoted to consideration of agenda item 10 (a) – General debate.

This record is subject to correction.

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Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this Conference will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the Conference.

Programme of work

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the Conference

1. The Temporary President declared open the Seventh Review Conference of the States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. The objective of the Convention was to exclude forever the possibility of disease being used as a weapon; the Convention itself was one of the pillars of the collective struggle against weapons of mass destruction. The purpose of the Review Conference was to review the operation of the Convention and to establish how best to maintain and strengthen its effectiveness.

Election of the President

2. **The Temporary President** said that at its meeting in April 2011, the Preparatory Committee had agreed to recommend to the Seventh Review Conference that Mr. Paul van den IJssel, Ambassador of the Netherlands, should preside over the Conference.

3. *Mr. van den IJssel (Netherlands) was elected President by acclamation.*

4. **The President** thanked States parties for their support and confidence in him and assured them that discussions would be open and transparent and that all opinions would be heard in order to enable the Review Conference to formulate an ambitious and realistic document on which all could agree.

Adoption of the agenda (BWC/CONF.VII/1)

5. **The President** said he took it that States parties wished to adopt the provisional agenda (BWC/CONF.VII/1), as recommended by the Preparatory Committee, as the agenda of the Seventh Review Conference.

6. *The agenda was adopted.*

Submission of the final report of the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.VII/PC/2)

7. **The President**, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, introduced the report of the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.VII/PC/2) and said he was pleased to report that all of the Committee's decisions and recommendations had been adopted by consensus in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. He expressed his appreciation to all the delegations that had participated in the work of the Committee and, in particular, to the Vice-Chairmen, as well as the regional group coordinators. In addition, he thanked the secretariat for having prepared various background information documents and States parties for having submitted information.

8. Speaking as President, he invited the Conference to take note, with appreciation, of the report of the Preparatory Committee.

9. *It was so decided.*

Adoption of the rules of procedure (BWC/CONF.VII/PC/2 (annex II))

10. **The President** invited the Conference to consider the draft rules of procedure recommended by the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.VII/PC/2 (annex II)) and drew its attention to paragraphs 21 to 23 of the Committee's report, in which it recommended amendments to rules 5, 8 and 43 (2). In respect of rule 5, the Committee recommended that the Review Conference should elect a Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen of the Drafting Committee. In respect of rule 8, it recommended that the General Committee should be

composed of the President of the Review Conference, the 20 Vice-Presidents, the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the three committees, the three regional group coordinators and the three depositaries. In respect of rule 43 (2), the Committee recommended that the committees might decide to hold certain meetings in public.

11. *The rules of procedure, as amended, were adopted.*

Requests to participate in the work of the Conference

12. **The President** said that Israel and Cameroon, which were not parties to the Convention, had asked to participate as observers in accordance with rule 44, paragraph 2, of the rules of procedure.

13. **Mr. Daryaei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the principled position of his delegation with regard to the participation of States not parties to the Convention was that such participation had been agreed by consensus as it would contribute to the universality of the Convention. However, if those States did not take specific steps towards acceding to the Convention, the question of their accession should be addressed. In addition, he emphasized that joining consensus on that issue should not be interpreted as recognition of the State of Israel.

14. **The President** said that if there was no objection, he took it that the Conference agreed to the requests of Israel and Cameroon.

15. *It was so decided.*

16. **The President** added that a number of specialized agencies and regional intergovernmental organizations had requested observer status in accordance with rule 44, paragraph 4, of the rules of procedure. Those agencies and organizations were the African Union, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health. If there was no objection, he took it that the Conference agreed to those requests.

17. *It was so decided.*

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference and Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Committee of the Whole, the Drafting Committee and the Credentials Committee

18. **The President** recalled that under rule 5 of the rules of procedure and in accordance with paragraphs 16 and 21 of the report of the Preparatory Committee, the Conference was required to elect 20 Vice-Presidents, comprising 10 members of the group of non-aligned and other States, 6 members of the Western group and 4 members of the group of Eastern European States.

19. The following candidates had been put forward on the basis of consultations in the regional groups:

- Group of non-aligned and other States: Algeria, Brazil, China, Cuba, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines and South Africa
- Western group: Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy and Japan
- Group of Eastern European States: Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Slovakia

20. *The States parties named were elected Vice-Presidents by acclamation.*

21. **The President** said that, following consultations, Mr. Desra Percaya (Indonesia) had been nominated Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and Mr. Eric Danon (France) and Mr. Gancho Ganey (Bulgaria) Vice-Chairmen. Ms. Judit Körömi (Hungary) had been nominated Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and Mr. John Walker (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and Ms. Tamara Kunanayakam (Sri Lanka) Vice-Chairmen. Mr. Mário Miranda Duarte (Portugal) had been nominated Chairman of the Credentials Committee, and Mr. Vipul (India) Vice-Chairman.

22. *Mr. Percaya (Indonesia) was elected Chairman and Mr. Danon (France) and Mr. Ganey (Bulgaria) Vice-Chairmen of the Committee of the Whole by acclamation.*

23. *Ms. Körömi (Hungary) was elected Chairman and Mr. Walker (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and Ms. Kunanayakam (Sri Lanka) Vice-Chairmen of the Drafting Committee by acclamation.*

24. *Mr. Miranda Duarte (Portugal) was elected Chairman and Mr. Vipul (India) Vice-Chairman of the Credentials Committee by acclamation.*

Credentials of representatives to the Conference

(a) Appointment of the Credentials Committee

25. **The President** said that, in accordance with rule 3 of the rules of procedure, the Review Conference was required to appoint five members to the Credentials Committee, in addition to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman. On the basis of consultations, he proposed the appointment of representatives of Ireland, Italy, Serbia and a further two States parties, to be nominated from the group of non-aligned and other States.

26. **Mr. Romero Puentes** (Cuba) said that the group of non-aligned and other States had not yet nominated States parties for those two positions.

27. **The President** said that the remaining members would be appointed when the group of non-aligned and other States was in a position to put forward nominations. If there were no objections, he took it that the Review Conference accepted the appointment of the States parties named.

28. *It was so decided.*

Confirmation of the nomination of the Secretary-General

29. **The President** said that pursuant to paragraph 28 of the report of the Preparatory Committee, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had nominated Mr. Richard Lennane, Head of the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit, as provisional Secretary-General of the Review Conference.

30. If he heard no objections, he took it that the Review Conference wished to confirm the nomination.

31. *It was so decided.*

Programme of work (BWC/CONF.VII/2)

32. **The President** drew the attention of the Conference to the provisional programme of work contained in document BWC/CONF.VII/2. He emphasized that the programme was indicative only and required delegations to remain flexible in order to manage the work of the Conference in the most efficient manner. If there was no objection, he took it that the Conference wished to adopt the indicative programme of work.

33. *It was so decided.*

34. **Mr. Daryaei** (Islamic Republic of Iran), welcoming the President's efforts to consult delegations about the programme of work, said that it was important to hold adequate consultations with States parties on the allocation of issues to the plenary and the Committee of the Whole, and on any possible changes in that regard.

35. **The President** said that he would strive to work in as transparent a manner as possible, in cooperation with the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and would keep delegates informed of the allocation of topics and agenda items to the committees.

Remarks of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Seventh Review Conference of the States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention

36. **The Secretary-General**, addressing the Conference via videolink, said that the Biological Weapons Convention was central to the global disarmament and non-proliferation framework. Over the past five years, States parties had developed common understandings aimed at better implementation of that critical instrument and had also built a vibrant network of concerned groups and individuals. All of that contributed to the joint goal of managing biological risks and helped to ensure that biological science and technology could be developed safely and securely, so that they brought benefits, not danger.

37. The Review Conference was a chance to build on those advances. Participants could address new developments in the field of life sciences and technology so that they could jointly respond to emerging risks. They could also take a fresh look at how to ensure that the Convention's non-proliferation provisions were carried out in full and continue joint efforts to make sure that all countries adhered to the Convention. Finally, they could boost cooperation on the peaceful uses of biological science and technology, which would directly support the Convention's goal of preventing the nightmare of biological warfare. He urged all participants to spare no effort in that crucial endeavour and wished them a successful and productive Conference.

Role of scientists in supporting the implementation of the Convention

38. **The President** said that in order to hear the perspectives from the wider world of biological science and technology, and to remind the Conference of the important role of the scientific community in supporting the aims and objectives of the Convention, two guest speakers had been invited to address the Conference. He invited the first speaker, Ms. Indira Nath, a scientist specializing in the immunology of infectious diseases and a prominent member of the InterAcademy Council, to take the floor.

39. **Ms. Nath** said that the Convention, as the legal embodiment of a powerful international norm against the use of disease as a weapon, held great personal significance for her as a researcher whose career was devoted to seeking cures for infectious disease. Her research on the immunology of leprosy and tuberculosis exemplified the enormous potential of science. Her studies had shown that the immune system was a powerful defence against many infectious organisms and diseases and that it could be effectively boosted with vaccines. They had also revealed that the body's defence was open to subversion by natural agents such as HIV, as well as drugs, chemicals and other environmental factors. Human health and survival could therefore be jeopardized deliberately by interfering with the immune system.

40. The economic growth experienced by her home country, India, had been fuelled in large part by the development of science and technology, particularly the Indian pharmaceuticals industry, which was a global player and a major provider of employment. In 2003, the Indian Government had created a trilateral partnership with Brazil and South Africa, known as IBSA, which had promoted a variety of activities, including the IBSA

nanotechnology initiative, which was a partnership between the ministries of science and technology of those countries that undertook nanotechnology-based projects in areas such as advanced materials, energy, health and water.

41. The scientific community had a role in helping to find the best mix of actions, from formal, legal requirements to norms and standards that governed the conduct of research, in order to reduce potential risks and misuse while enabling continued scientific progress and the diffusion of scientific and technical capacity around the world.

42. By involving the scientific community in the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, the States parties were able to draw on the existing culture of responsibility in the scientific community. Biosafety — the responsibility to protect the health of workers, the broader community and the environment — was an important part of that culture of responsibility. Important efforts were under way to improve biosafety around the globe and to use it as a foundation to enhance security.

43. Science did not operate in a vacuum and the ethical dimensions of scientific conduct, including universal values such as honesty and openness, had long been recognized. The most recent edition of *On Being a Scientist*, an introduction to responsible conduct in research by the United States National Academy of Sciences, noted that the standards of science extended beyond responsibilities that were internal to the scientific community and that researchers had a duty to reflect on how their work might be used in broader society. Those responsibilities were recognized internationally, in forums such as the Second World Conference on Research Integrity, held in 2010.

44. A new project on scientific responsibility and research integrity was being undertaken by the InterAcademy Council and the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues. The latter was a global network of over 100 of the world's science academies that focused primarily on helping member academies work together to advise citizens and public officials on the scientific aspects of critical global issues. The InterAcademy Council produced reports on scientific, technological and health issues related to contemporary global challenges to inform and advise national Governments and international organizations. In the first phase of the new project, the InterAcademy Council and the InterAcademy Panel would be developing a short policy report on research integrity, focusing on the issues of research practices and management, the reward structure for scientists, principles of scientific integrity, and culture. In the second phase, an expanded expert committee would develop international educational materials for individual scientists, educators and institutional managers, addressing the principles of scientific responsibility, including scientific ethics, integrity and responsibility for avoiding the misuse of science. The project reflected the recognition by science academies that they could and should play a leading role in promoting scientific integrity, and it was expected to contribute to a more robust dialogue and the development of educational programmes and materials at the international level.

45. While rapid advances in the life sciences and related disciplines offered great promise for health, the economy and the environment, there was a growing recognition that those advances also carried potential risks. Scientists and scientific organizations had been responding to those risks, particularly through the Biosecurity Working Group of the InterAcademy Panel, which, in partnership with other international scientific organizations, had pursued projects on two main fronts: firstly, to educate the scientific community about its responsibility to mitigate the risks associated with the potential misuse of developments in the life sciences, and, secondly, to improve the ability of international scientific organizations to provide advice on the implications of advances in the life sciences.

46. She noted that the Conference had played a significant role in helping to engage the scientific community, particularly through the intersessional process, by focusing on issues

that directly affected the conduct of science, such as the meetings on codes of conduct in 2005 and on education and oversight in 2008. Science and technology had also been an important element in the expert meetings on capacity-building in the field of disease surveillance in 2009 and on responding to the alleged use of biological agents in 2010. She knew she spoke for many of her scientific colleagues when she said that she hoped the Conference's engagement with scientists would continue as States parties considered their programme of work for the next five years. For most scientists, broad concerns about the social responsibility of science and scientific ethics would be the best entry point for engagement in the specific issues covered by the Convention. More could then be done to address the misuse of science to cause deliberate harm. The Review Conference presented an important opportunity for States parties to reinforce and support the essential role that education and awareness-raising would play in enabling the scientific community to meet its responsibilities under the Convention, and also to continue building links between the Conference and the scientific community with a view to ensuring that science was used solely to support human progress.

47. **The President** introduced the next guest speaker, Ms. Esther Ng, the winner of an essay competition for young scientists organized by the Implementation Support Unit and sponsored by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Graduate and undergraduate scientists had been invited to submit an essay on responsible conduct in the life sciences, the importance of safety and security, and the role of international collaboration in the biological sciences. Congratulating Ms. Ng on her success, he invited her to present her winning essay entitled "Biosecurity – the role of young scientists".

48. **Ms. Ng** said that, while the exponential growth of biomedical technology had brought about unimaginable advances in health care, they were accompanied by unprecedented threats to biosecurity. Maintaining a safe environment was the shared responsibility of scientists — including young scientists — government officials and members of the public.

49. Genomics was arguably one of the most rapidly developing fields in biomedical science and many junior scientists were trained in biomedical programmes that emphasized skills in genomics, proteomics and metabolomics, opening up various avenues for developing solutions to biosecurity problems. One such avenue was research into methods for detecting and characterizing pathogens with potential for nefarious use. Emerging techniques, such as whole genome analysis and signature-tagged mutagenesis, had provided much useful information on, for example, the characterization of virulence factors in *Bacillus anthracis* and the identification of antimicrobial susceptibility genes in *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, the agents classified by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as having the highest and second highest priority respectively in terms of their risk for bioterrorism.

50. Such research might also yield unexpected benefits for less developed nations, since some potential bioterrorism agents were uncommon in temperate zones, and yet caused infection in tropical climates. One example was *Burkholderia* infection, which was endemic in South-East Asia and caused considerable morbidity and mortality among those predisposed to the disease. Research on effective antimicrobials would certainly benefit such regions, in addition to attenuating the consequences of deliberate dissemination in regions where such infection was uncommon.

51. Since they were at the start of their careers, junior scientists had more freedom to explore novel and creative solutions. An example was the development of comprehensive phage virulence libraries which allowed for the rapid response and quick development of antibiotics against infectious agents with high potential for misuse.

52. International collaboration was particularly important to efforts to strengthen biosecurity on a global scale. Advances in computational technology should be utilized to share large amounts of data quickly and securely in the interest of biosecurity, including data on selected agents with high potential for misuse. While regulations had been developed to monitor laboratory work on such agents, they did not apply to DNA sequences, which could be obtained by non-specialists with relative ease. Although several companies involved in synthetic biology had begun to screen sequence requests against databases of virulent pathogens, the databases were incomplete and poorly annotated and would benefit from international collaboration between biologists, bioinformaticians and computer scientists.

53. Mathematical modelling was another area that would benefit from international and interdisciplinary collaboration. The difficulties of making realistic contingency plans for biological attacks could be partly alleviated through the construction of detailed models, for example by using differential equations to model containment and control strategies in the event of a smallpox release. As scientists, it was important to remain aware of the dual-use dilemma and to generate ideas for security improvements while minimizing the impediments to research. It was also important to be vigilant against irregular activity that might indicate potential misuse of biological agents, a role for which junior researchers, who spent a great deal of time in laboratories, were aptly positioned.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.10 a.m.