

**Geneva, 20 November – 8 December 2006**

Item 10 of the agenda

**Review of the operation of the Convention  
as provided for in its Article XII**

## **CODES OF CONDUCT FOR SCIENTISTS**

Submitted by the United Kingdom

### **Introduction**

1. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office hosted a seminar on 26 October 2006 to disseminate the results of the 2005 Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) to science practitioners in academia and government. Dr. Kim Howells MP, Minister of State in the FCO, opened the meeting. Over 70 scientists attended the meeting from a range of academic institutions, learned societies and government laboratories. There were several presentations to encourage debate. Participants were first briefed on the 2005 international meetings of BTWC States Parties. A representative from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) then briefed on the joint policy agreed by the Wellcome Trust, the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the BBSRC on managing the risks of misuse associated with grant-funded research activity. There was also a presentation from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) on its "Principles of Good Scientific Practice" by way of example.

### **Detail**

2. There was a useful exchange of views by the participants on issues such as: the dual-use nature of biosciences and the challenges involved in ensuring that science is not misused; the value and status of codes of conduct; and the current state of awareness of the Convention among students.

3. The key points of the discussion fell under two main themes:

- (a) Fostering a culture where scientists consider the potential for the misuse of their work, for example:
  - (i) by raising awareness during education, perhaps as part of induction programmes, including the preparation of standardised educational material, and a continuing programme of awareness raising; also including education on risk assessment relating to the potential for misuse of science;

- (ii) by encouraging research funders to develop a process to manage the risk of the work they fund being misused, following the example set by the Wellcome Trust/MRC/BBSRC policy and processes;
  - (iii) by considering not only the benefits but also the risks related to the publication of work that may have the potential to be misused, bearing in mind the challenge open access publishing via the internet provides; and
  - (iv) by raising awareness of the issues with students, both from the UK and overseas, and ensuring appropriate vetting.
- (b) Issues related to the implementation of codes of conduct, including:
- (i) the sometimes lengthy timescales required for developing and implementing codes;
  - (ii) the likely increase in the number of codes in the future;
  - (iii) the possibility of drawing lessons from work on codes relevant to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

## **Conclusion**

4. Participants concluded that the seminar had been very useful. The imperative was to keep the issue alive and under discussion. It was encouraging to know that the general consensus was that, if embedded in existing systems and both feasible and proportionate, codes of conduct had a utility. It was not so much a question of whether to have codes but how to pursue them. There was a general consensus that scientists were on the right track, but that work was needed to ensure that appropriate progress continued. Also, there might be some role for Government in the production of suitable educational material but that the process of raising awareness and education in the science community should not be led by Government in the UK.

5. It was also encouraging that the UK science community wanted to contribute to the international debate on this issue. Indeed participants thought it would be useful to raise this issue in international professional bioscience organisations. In the UK an umbrella organisation - the Biosciences Federation - had been set up to cover all the bioscience disciplines. There was a hope that this would be duplicated internationally.

6. It was interesting to note that while much of the discussion and the emerging themes were familiar from the 2005 BTWC meetings and the UK's preparation for them, the participants were in large part different to those with whom we worked before. This was further encouragement that this work was going in the right direction and broadly applicable to practitioners of science.

7. Finally, the participants thought it would be useful to have a repetition of the seminar next year, possibly including international partners.

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