

Belgium

Intervention to the 9th BWC Revcon

Mr President,

1. I would like to congratulate you; Ambassador Bencini, for taking the important task to preside over this important RevCon. Belgium views the BWC as an essential part of the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. My delegation stands ready to work constructively towards a successful outcome.
2. Indeed, we deem it important for this meeting to give a clear signal towards the world, seven years have passed since the last BWC Revcon. COVID19 has made us all realize how quickly diseases can cross borders and put stress on health systems and have an extraordinary impact over societies worldwide. Science and technology has developed quickly. The Revcon is the perfect opportunity to reflect and consolidate the work that was done during the intersessional period and strengthen the convention.
3. Process-wise; this revcon should also plot a roadmap for the upcoming cycle. Given the rapid developments in biosciences, states parties should look at measures to mitigate the long periods in between revcons so that the BWC can remain relevant over the longer term by keeping up with the state of play in biosciences. Therefore; Belgium is a co-sponsor of the Canadian-Dutch working paper that proposes to set up a working-group in the intersessional program.
4. Our priorities for this re con are the following, content wise:
 - Although the BWC is the legally binding norm that prohibits development, production, stockpiling and usage of biological agents and toxins, it is currently void of a verification system. An intelligent verification system would further structurally solidify the convention. We hope this revcon will lead states parties to come to a more convergent views on measures which can accomplish this in the short and the longer term.
 - In order to improve biosafety and biosecurity, big steps can be taken; but practical incremental measures can also have an exponential impact. Therefore, Belgium has initiated a working document on the use of international, regional and national biorisk management standards by life-science communities, the value of which was recognized in the outcome document of the 7th BTWC RevCon. I'd like to stress that this working paper is supported by a cross regional group of countries. It aims to strengthen and/or complement several articles of the convention including articles 4, 7 and 10. While governments have the responsibility to set up the appropriate legislative and regulatory framework to ensure biosafety and biosecurity, this policy can also be enhanced by measures taken by the life science institutions and industry.
 - As I mentioned before, it is urgent and necessary to keep pace with advancements in Science and Technology. Therefore, it is urgent for states parties to consider concrete measures when it comes to a science and technology review process based on more frequent assessments.

- Finally; this revcon is taking place against the backdrop of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. We have all witnessed the process that took place in the context of article 5 as well as article 6, as invoked by Russia. Belgium has expressed its views clearly on this during the consultations in September. In our view, this process has been concluded with clear conclusions, and we repeat that, in our view, the cooperation took place within the application of article X. Further enhancement of international cooperation, assistance and exchange in biological sciences and technology for peaceful purposes and capacity building measures should be strengthened.
5. Mr. President, as a final remark, I would like to express, once again, our strong and full support for the Secretary General's mechanism for the investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons.

I thank you.