Meeting 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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Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Development of a voluntary model code of conduct for biological scientists and all relevant personnel, and biosecurity education, by drawing on the work already done on this issue in the context of the Convention, adaptable to national requirements

Proposal for the development of a model code of conduct for biological scientists under the Biological Weapons Convention

Submitted by China and Pakistan

1. With the ever increasing depth and scope of bio-research, the biological science and technology has entered the fast track of development, making great contribution to the well-being of humanity. However, the development of the bio-science and technology, particularly dual-use biological research, may give rise to unpredictable negative impact, such as increasing risks of misuse and abuse of bio-technology, posing challenges to the global bio-safety and security governance.

2. Biological researchers are not only at the front line of bio-science and technology development, but also constitute a primary line of defense against the misuse and abuse of bio-technology. To raise bio-safety and security awareness and enhance ethical self-discipline among biological researchers is key to prevention of misuse and abuse.

3. The Sixth Review Conference of BWC in 2006 conducted discussion on strengthening of Article IV of the BWC and reached the following consensus as contained the Final Document, “the Conference recognizes the importance of codes of conduct and self-regulatory mechanisms in raising awareness, and calls upon States Parties to support and encourage their development, promulgation and adoption”.

4. In order to achieve the objective and purpose of the BWC, to enhance guidance and regulation of biological research, and to improve global bio-safety and security governance,

it is necessary to develop a model code of conduct for biological scientists under the framework of the BWC. Such a model code of conduct would encourage biological researchers to timely evaluate and consciously avoid bio-research related risks, to properly tackle any possible negative impacts, and to make all efforts to prevent misuse and/or abuse of bio-technology.

5. At the 2015 MSP, China submitted a proposal for the development of a model code of conduct for biological scientists under the Biological Weapons Convention. Pakistan cosponsored this proposal. The proposal has been well received and widely supported by States Parties. China and Pakistan submitted a draft of the model code of conduct at the Eighth Review Conference in 2016

6. The 2017 MSP decided to include the topic of "development of a model code of conduct for biological scientists" into the 2018-2020 inter-sessional programme for the Meetings of Experts, specifically in MX2-Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention.

7. In June 2018, China and the Implementation Support Unit co-organized an international workshop on "Building a Global Community of Shared Future for Bio-security: Development of a Code of Conduct for Biological Scientists" in Tianjin. More than 20 countries participated in the workshop and discussed the "development of a model code of conduct for biological scientists" in depth.

8. On the basis of the above-mentioned efforts, China revised the model code of conduct by incorporating comments and suggestions made by parties in the previous discussions. We hope that this revised version could serve as a basis for further discussion.

9. Hereby, we propose to:

- Continue in-depth discussion on the topic of "development of a model code of conduct for biological scientists", with a view to reaching consensus on the content of the model code of conduct.
- Facilitate the approval of the model code of conduct for biological scientists by the Ninth Review Conference, as well as the authorization by the Review Conference to work on implementation and promotion of the model code of conduct in the future inter-sessional process.

Annex: A Model Code of Conduct for Biological Scientists (draft)

Annex

A Model Code of Conduct for Biological Scientists (draft)

At present, biological science and technology represented by genetic engineering and synthetic biology are undergoing fast development and convergence, creating new opportunities for development. At the same time, growing operability of biological technology is giving rise to increasing infectiousness, lethality as well as spreading and escaping capability of the pathogens, thus further lowering the threshold of biological weapons production, increasing the possibility of misuse and abuse of biological technology and probability of bio-terrorism. Against this background, implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention and the construction of a global community of shared future for bio-security are encountering new challenges and potential threats. Given the bearing of bio-science and technology on the existence of the humankind, the global community should take a forward-looking approach to regulating research and development of bio-science and technology so as to counter new bio-security challenges and achieve sustainable development for human society.

States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention recommend that biological scientists and research institutions shall follow the hereinafter code of conduct when conducting bio-science research and other related activities.

1. (Ethical standard) Respect human life. Respect the dignity of humanity, and always revere life and consciously protect human rights. Respect social ethics, morality and social norms and traditions. Consciously maintain a harmonious relationship between humankind and the ecological environment. Constantly pay attention to protection of ecological environment. Consciously abide by legal regulations and standards governing scientific research. Refrain from behaviors intentionally or unintentionally ignoring laws and regulations and circumventing supervision.

2. (Research integrity) Hold an attitude of rigor and integrity when conducting research. When conducting scientific researches which is still controversial, researchers and institutions should fully consider the potential ethical and moral risks, strive to ensure that all those who may be affected benefit directly or indirectly from the research, and try to minimize possible hazards of the research.

3. (Respect for the object of research) Respect the object of bio-science research, including human and non-human organisms. In researches involving human subject, the legal rights and privacy of the human subject shall be fully protected, and his or her right of informed consent be guaranteed.

4. (Process management for science research) Enhance risk control during the formulation and implementation of a bio-science research project. Conduct sufficient assessment and feasibility study on the possible threats the research process or outcomes may cause to health and the society. Establish effective prevention and emergency response plans to mitigate relevant risks, and put in place a whole-process oversight mechanism on the research projects.

5. (Constraint on the spread of research outcome) Strike a balance between public security and the freedom of research and speech. Use accurate and clear language when disseminating research outcomes to avoid misunderstanding from the general public. Limit or prohibit the dissemination of academic achievements which might be abused by non-state actors or pose threats to public health. The academic community shall publicly denounce academic misconduct in bio-research.

6. (Popularization of science and technology) Attach great importance to popularization of bio-technology. Biological scientists have an obligation to educate the general public on bio-science and technology. When doing so, they are encouraged to make use of modern media and hi-tech means, to introduce both the positive impact and the potential risks of the bio-science development in an objective and comprehensive manner, and to assuage panic among the general public due to lack of information. Oppose fabrication of biotechnology events inconsistent with facts and news hyping.

7. (Institution's role) Strengthen oversight of scientific institutions. Institutions shall conduct real-time monitoring and periodical assessment of research activities to mitigate potential risks and threats. Establish independent risk review committees within the institutions composed of scholars from relevant fields. Improve evaluation mechanism on publication of bio-science results.

8. (Education and training) Scientific community and professional associations should play an active role in education and training. Increase public awareness of the Convention, and establish a safety education and training system for all parties involved in biotechnology research. Biological scientists should be encouraged to engage in dialogue and cooperation with social scientists, philosophers and anthropologists, so as to have a better understanding of the possible ethical and social implication of relevant biological research and its outcome.

9. (Awareness and engagement) Biological scientists should be fully aware of the potential threats of dual-use research to human society, ecological environment and economic security. It is advocated to promote the peaceful application of biological research achievements, to prevent the abuse and misuse of biological products, scientific knowledge, technology and equipment, and to consciously resist any unethical scientific conducts that are harmful to human society.

10. (International exchanges) Actively participate in international cooperation in the field of bio-science and technology research. Actively explore models and avenues for sharing of bio-science achievements. Biological scientists around the world are encouraged to work closely for progress and innovation in bio-science and technology through learning from and inspire each other, with a view to promote the well-being and health of humankind.