
Ninth 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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Item 12 of the provisional agenda

Follow-up to the recommendations and decisions of the Eighth Review Conference and the question of future review of the Convention

Establishing a BTWC Science and Technology Advisory Process

Submitted by Switzerland

I. Background

1. Long-standing debates and efforts of many States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and civil society have fostered broad support for a science and technology advisory process under the Convention and contributed to our collective preparations for the Ninth Review Conference. The importance of this matter is particularly highlighted by the fact that scientific and technological developments underpin all operational articles of the Convention. In particular, Article XII requests States Parties to “review the operation of the Convention” in a way that “shall take into account any new scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention”. We face a significant acceleration of developments in science and technology that play a pivotal role in the effectiveness and continued relevance of the Convention. Thus, Switzerland believes that States Parties should seize the opportunity of the upcoming Ninth Review Conference and reach an agreement on a dedicated (i.e. independent), specialized (i.e. technical), structured, and systematic science and technology advisory process.

2. The setup of such an advisory process should go beyond the current practice of addressing the multifaceted complexities of scientific and technological issues uniquely in the framework of the Meetings of Experts. It should usefully complement the existing framework with an additional layer of purely scientific and technical considerations, in order to identify relevant developments and assess their potential implications for the Convention. This approach does not in any way question the value of the intersessional process, but would rather maximize its utility, inform other meetings under the Convention and be of immense benefit to the BTWC and its States Parties. An advisory process dedicated to reviewing scientific and technological developments will provide a more robust and comprehensive technical foundation on which to base our policy discussions, conclusions and decisions.

II. Considerations regarding the design of a scientific and technological advisory process

3. Intense discussions over many years on a scientific and technological advisory process have considered the many aspects of scope, group composition and costs, guidance and coordination, input and reporting, as initially laid out in Switzerland’s Working Paper to the Preparatory Committee of the Eighth Review Conference ([BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/WP.8](#)). Over time, discussions have indicated commonalities of views on many aspects of such an



advisory process, or at least a considerable degree of political flexibility. The topic generating by far the most vivid expression of differing views concerned the composition of, and participation in, such an advisory process.

4. To that end, [BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/WP.16](#), submitted to the Preparatory Committee of the Eighth Review Conference, provided an overview of options to facilitate the debate at that time and to assist the exploration of avenues for the convergence of views as follows:

<i>Option 1</i>	<i>Option 2</i>	<i>Option 3</i>	<i>Option 4</i>	<i>Option 5</i>
Open to all States Parties that nominate scientific experts	Open to all States Parties that nominate max. 1 - 2 (to be determined) scientific experts	Half (to be determined) of the States Parties of each regional group (participating states to be decided by consensus in each regional group) nominate 1 scientific expert each	Open to all States Parties that nominate max. 1 - 2 (to be determined) scientific experts allocated to a certain number of sub-working groups focusing on specific topics (to be determined)	20 - 25 (to be determined) scientific experts appointed by the regional groups (to be decided by consensus in each regional group / ratio between the regional groups to be determined)

5. During the last intersessional process, discussions have significantly evolved: States Parties have increasingly emphasized the value of 'hybrid models' that would bridge the seemingly irreconcilable calls for inclusivity, which would be best addressed with an open-ended model (e.g. Option 1), and manageability, which would be best addressed with a limited participation model (e.g. Option 5). Switzerland is convinced of the urgent need to surmount any binary perspectives and close in on a 'hybrid model' that presents options for striking the right balance between inclusivity and manageability of a science and technology advisory process through functional structures and the goal-oriented allotment of experts to specific tasks.

6. The open-ended models (Options 1 or 2) would presumably include many individual contributors, while at first sight, Option 5 appears more limited in participation. However, to best account for the many facets of current technology and to be able to draw from experts in all relevant fields, such a small group as in Option 5 would require significant inputs from additional subject matter experts, through e.g. several temporary working groups. Consequently, total numbers of participants in limited participation models such as in Option 5 would likely be in the range of those in open-ended models.

7. Irrespective of the chosen model, adequate organizational structuring will be of utmost importance to keep it manageable. Examples of possible 'hybrid models' have been described in UNIDIR's publication 'Exploring Science and Technology Review Mechanisms under the Biological Weapons Convention' (<https://bit.ly/3hGfOHI>, page 41), or in the Federation of American Scientists' workshop report as annexed to WP.7 of the 2020/21 Meetings of Experts 2 ([BWC/MSP/2020/MX.2/WP.7](#)). All aim at bridging open-ended and limited-participation models, in order to strike an acceptable balance between inclusivity and manageability.

8. Switzerland believes that 'hybrid models' along the lines of Option 4 or a mix of Option 2 and Option 5 would represent an optimal way forward to set up a scientific and technological advisory process that strikes an adequate balance between inclusivity and manageability. Possible options to this effect include:

A. Open-ended participation with sub-working groups

- Annual meeting open to all interested States Parties that nominate 1 scientific expert each;

- Subdivided into a certain number of sub-working groups, each of which addresses a specific topic;
- The groups would synthesize a technical report.

B. Open-ended to limited participation

- Stage 1: Annual meeting open to all interested States Parties that nominate 1 scientific expert each to discuss relevant topics;
- Stage 2: Committee composed of 20 - 25 experts meets to study the considerations of the annual meeting and synthesize a technical report.

C. Limited to open-ended participation

- Stage 1: Meeting of a committee of 20 - 25 scientific experts discussing relevant topics;
- Stage 2: All interested States Parties nominate 1 scientific expert each to meet and study the considerations of the Committee and synthesize a final report.

9. Any of the above 'hybrid models' would require dedicated support from the BWC ISU. The added workload of the ISU could require additional resources, potentially with the need for a Scientific Officer.

10. Costs could be covered by a combination of funding sources, including assessed contributions to cover the basic meeting costs as well as voluntary contributions in cases where additional specific questions were to be addressed. To limit the costs, working language at meetings could be limited to English, whereas reports would be translated into all official UN languages.

III. Recommendation

11. Adapting to the scientific and technological developments in the life sciences plays a pivotal role for the effectiveness and continued relevance of the BTWC. In order to keep up with the pace of these advances, States Parties should agree on the establishment of a scientific and technological advisory process that would ideally be shaped along the idea of a 'hybrid model', thus maximizing the benefits of simpler models: maintain the manageability of a limited participation model while benefitting from the breadth (in terms of expertise, disciplines, geographical and gender representation), flexibility and inclusivity of an open-ended model. Switzerland believes that different options exist to meet these requirements as illustrated by the options identified above, and hopes this will serve to facilitate consensus at the upcoming Ninth Review Conference on the establishment of a scientific and technological advisory process.
