



## Intervention by Sri Lanka

### The Fifth Meeting of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), 02-13 December 2024, in Geneva

#### Science & Technology Review Mechanism (10 December 2024)

Mr. Chair,

Sri Lanka appreciates your efforts in presenting an ambitious road map together with a proposal to convene a Special Conference in 2025, with the earnest hope of bringing the two years of discussions at this Working Group towards a tangible outcome.

Today, we have come to a point where we need to deliver on what we have been deliberating over the years or at least strive to see how far we can go and reshape our path towards a solid outcome. In that sense, we welcome the proposal by the Chair and look forward to constructively engaging with all States Parties to decide our way forward based on consensus while recognizing the concerns of all Members.

Mr. Chair

We understand the proposed 'Science & Technology Review Mechanism' is an important element of the proposed roadmap as well as Convention and we value the efforts of Friends of Chair for driving the mandate of the Working Group throughout the past year, particularly crafting the recommendation on Science & Technology Review Mechanism in an inclusive approach.

Science & Technology can be considered as one of the vital elements related to the Biological Weapons Convention. As we are aware, advances in biological science and bio-technology could pose risks and threats which could lead to potential breaches of the Convention while the same can be of benefit to fight against such risks by developing vaccines and medicines. It is important to be mindful of this dual-use nature of life sciences which bring both advancements and challenges to the implementation of the Convention when we deliberate on the elements of the Science & Technology Review Mechanism. As we consider the proposed Science & Technology Review Mechanism after five decades of signing the Biological Weapons Convention in 1972, the rapid evolution of bioscience and biotechnology and emerging challenges, as well as associated risks posed by advancement of wide range of sciences and technologies in the world need to be adequately captured in this mechanism.

While firmly believing that the proposed mechanism should be an integral part of strengthening the Convention, Sri Lanka wishes to make the following observations;

- I. The States Parties may strive to **minimize the complexity** of the proposed Science & Technology Mechanism with a view to **make it more pragmatic and sustainable**.
- II. This Advisory Mechanism should **ensure equal access to all States Parties** to receive specific advice on scientific and technological developments relevant to the

Convention, exchange of relevant information on latest scientific developments regardless of scientific or technical capabilities, and economic status of the States.

- III. The proposed review group, reporting committee and temporary groups under this Advisory Mechanism should **operate in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner and with a balanced approach**.
- IV. While noting that the **Science and Technology Reporting Committee** of up to 25 members drawing from the Science and Technology Review Group will serve in their individual expert capacities, we underline that **a clear selection criterion** is vital. The level of expertise and experience should be clear and **should proportionately accommodate experts from developing countries**. It is important to **reflect geographical and gender balance** in the Reporting Committee as recommended in the non-paper.
- V. The **number of members of the Reporting Committee should be flexible** to accommodate a reasonable number of experts depending on the number of nominations received by the states and the necessity of having relevant experts in the Committee while striking the balance between numbers and geographical and gender representation.
- VI. Clearly pre-defined selection criteria for standing bodies of Advisory Mechanism will be crucial to **avoid any conflict of interest** and the **experts to the Advisory Mechanism should be free from influence of the nominating government** and vital to ensure the **independence and transparency** of their work.
- VII. We propose **setting up ethical standards** to be followed by the scientists and experts in serving in the standing bodies of this Mechanism
- VIII. This Mechanism needs to be improved to **hear the voices of developing and least developed countries** even in the event such countries do not have capacity to nominate experts in the relevant field.
- IX. Given the rapid development in science and technology, we perceive the importance of **nominating experts from diversified fields** of related sciences such as biology, biotechnology, microbiology, molecular biology, biochemistry, biosecurity, immunology, epidemiology etc. as well as in **a multidisciplinary approach** including in the field of technologies related to military development, security, artificial intelligence (AI) etc.

Mr. Chair,

In view of the road map and the proposal that you have put forwarded as a basis for our discussions at this Working Group, we wish to emphasize that both the **International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) mechanism and the Science & Technology mechanism** should be independent, transparent and sustainable and their **parallel progress** will be vital to reach the desired outcomes.

We understand that the **pragmatic and effective operation** of these two mechanisms will be important in the universal implementation of the BWC.

Mr. Chair

Sri Lanka attaches great importance in **addressing the needs of developing and least developed countries** through these mechanisms and we are committed to extend our fullest cooperation in strengthening the Biological Weapons Conventions in a realistic manner while considering the concerns of all States Parties in a consensual approach.

Thank you