



Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Annual Meeting of States Parties

Ambassador Donald Mahley, U.S. Head of Delegation

Opening Statement
Geneva, Switzerland
December 5, 2005

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation congratulates you on the success of the June Experts Meeting and we look forward to working with you this week as we review lessons gained on "Scientific and Professional Responsibility ... and the content, promulgation, and adoption of codes of conduct for scientists." As in earlier years of the Work Program, we are pleased that States Parties are actively engaging in the substance of the issue. Unique to this topic is the emphasis on the need for scientific organizations to develop their own, appropriate, codes of conduct. Despite the organizational challenge of having professional groups brief the BWC States Parties, the purpose of the Meeting was well fulfilled. Expert discussions and exchanges that took place before, during and following the meeting have helped generate a greater understanding of emerging codes of conduct, their role in reinforcing, and in some ways personalizing, the norm against biological and toxin weapons, and provide an impetus to efforts promoting scientists' professional responsibilities.

We believe that Codes can become an increasingly important tool in the fight against bioweapons proliferators and the biothreat overall. Concerns about the misuse of biotechnology and a desire to preserve the free flow of scientific information have spurred discussion about the professional responsibility of the scientific community and the proper role of national governments in promoting standards. In the past few months, a number of scientific and professional organizations, as well as NGOs and IGOs, have proposed guidelines for general and targeted codes. A universal code, we believe, is neither practical nor necessarily desirable. Generic principles of codes of conduct, in our opinion, are the best recommendations for consideration by BWC States Parties.

Last Thursday, December 1, the "InterAcademy Panel," (IAP), the umbrella organization for the National Academies of Science worldwide, released basic principles relating to the construct of Codes. These principles have been formally endorsed by 69 of the 92 IAP members. With the caveat that the principles are not a comprehensive list, the IAP presents "fundamental issues that should be taken into account when formulating codes of conduct." To summarize, the basic themes are: 1) awareness by scientists of the possible consequences of their research and the need to refuse any research that has only harmful outcomes, 2) safety and security, wherein scientists working with dangerous pathogens have the responsibility to ensure good pathogen security and biosecurity practices "whether codified by law or common practice," 3) increased distribution of educational information on both the potential for misuse of dual-use materials and the laws and regulations aimed at preventing misuse, 4) accountability of scientists to notify appropriate authorities should a violation of the BWC or other related legislation, regulations or guidelines occur, and finally 5) the responsibility of scientists with oversight functions to instill these principles in others. The full text of these basic principles can be found on the IAP website - www.interacademies.net/iap.

This enhanced recognition by scientists and others, and by States Parties to the BWC of scientists' professional responsibilities toward ethical and responsible behavior, complements States Parties' national compliance objectives and contributes to our overall international security.

As we enter the final meeting of the 2003-2005 Work Program, we note that our meetings provided one of the largest-ever international gatherings of experts on implementation measures, pathogen security, disease surveillance/suspicious outbreaks of disease/alleged use of biological weapons and codes of conduct for the life sciences. The expert discussions, and related preparatory and follow-on work, has created renewed awareness of the importance of effective national measures and how such measures are a key component in stemming the threat of biological weapons. Indeed, in the consideration of how to strengthen and make more effective the BWC regime, the strengthening of national efforts to implement the Convention are key. The work of the past three years has been constructive, and underlines this fact.

Mr. Chairman, we hope that the unique efforts this year can be captured in some overarching manner and we look forward to a thorough review of national progress on all the Work Program topics at the Review Conference next year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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