

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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Summary record (partial)* of the 1st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 28 November 2022, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Ms. Nakamitsu (Under-Secretary-General
and High Representative
for Disarmament Affairs)

President: Mr. Bencini (Italy)

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* In accordance with rule 42 of the rules of procedure of the Conference, no summary records were prepared for meetings, or parts of meetings, devoted to consideration of agenda item 10 (a) – General debate.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the Conference

1. **The Temporary President**, on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared open the 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.

Election of the President

2. **The Temporary President** said that, at its meeting in April 2022, the Preparatory Committee for the Ninth Review Conference had decided to recommend that Mr. Leonardo Bencini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament, should preside over the Ninth Review Conference, on the understanding that the Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States retained its rotational right to preside over the Tenth Review Conference.

3. *Mr. Bencini (Italy) was elected President by acclamation.*

4. **The President** said that he wished to thank the States parties for their support and confidence in him. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had delayed the work of the Review Conference by one year and had shortened the time available for preparation. He was sure, however, that, despite those challenges, the Conference would accomplish the tasks with which it had been mandated under the Convention and would achieve a successful and meaningful outcome. The preparatory activities prior to the Conference had resulted in a number of working papers, many of which contained specific proposals that were ready for adoption. There had been a high level of participation in regional preparatory meetings thanks to the Convention sponsorship programme. The number of statements on confidence-building measures that had been submitted over the course of one year – a total of 95 – was the highest ever. One State had acceded to the Convention in 2022, bringing the total number of States parties to 184.

Adoption of the agenda (BWC/CONF.IX/1)

5. **The President** said that the provisional agenda (BWC/CONF.IX/1) for the Ninth Review Conference was accompanied by an annotated provisional agenda (BWC/CONF.IX/1/Add.1) prepared by the Implementation Support Unit. The provisional agenda did not contain a separate sub-item on financial issues, which could be discussed under item 13 on other matters. Items 10 to 13 represented the bulk of the work of the Conference. He invited the Conference to adopt the provisional agenda as recommended by the Preparatory Committee.

6. *The agenda was adopted.*

Submission of the final report of the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.IX/PC/10)

7. **The President** introduced the final report of the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.IX/PC/10) and said that he was pleased to report that all the Committee's decisions and recommendations had been adopted by consensus in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill. He wished to thank all the delegations that had participated in the work of the Committee. He invited the Conference to take note, with appreciation, of the final report of the Preparatory Committee.

8. *It was so decided.*

Adoption of the rules of procedure (BWC/CONF.IX/2)

9. **The President** invited the Conference to consider the draft rules of procedure recommended by the Preparatory Committee (BWC/CONF.IX/2) and drew its attention to paragraphs 31 to 34 of the Committee's final report, in which the Committee had recommended amendments to rules 5, 8 and 43 (2). In respect of rule 5, the Committee recommended that the Conference should elect not one but two Vice-Chairs of the Drafting Committee. In respect of rule 8, it recommended that the General Committee should be

composed of the President and the 20 Vice-Presidents of the Conference, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Committee of the Whole, the Drafting Committee and the Credentials Committee, the three regional group coordinators and representatives of the three depositary Governments. In respect of rule 43 (2), the Committee recommended that the committees might decide to hold certain meetings in public.

10. *The rules of procedure, as amended, were adopted.*

Requests to participate in the work of the Conference

11. **The President** said that Comoros, Djibouti, Israel and South Sudan, which were not parties to the Convention, had requested to participate as observers in accordance with rule 44 (2) of the rules of procedure. He took it that the Conference agreed to those requests.

12. *It was so decided.*

13. **The President** said that a number of specialized agencies and international organizations had requested observer status in accordance with rule 44 (4) of the rules of procedure. Some had also requested to submit their views in writing in accordance with the rules of procedure. Those agencies and organizations were Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the European Union, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Organization of American States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health. He took it that the Conference agreed to those requests.

14. *It was so decided.*

15. **The President** said that he wished to extend a warm welcome to the national experts from developing countries who were participating in the Conference through the Convention sponsorship programme. Their attendance was an important step towards achieving the goal of broader participation and diversity. He encouraged the experts to participate actively in the Conference's deliberations.

Election of the Vice-Presidents of the Conference and the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of the Committee of the Whole, the Drafting Committee and the Credentials Committee

16. **The President** said that, pursuant to rule 5 of the rules of procedure and paragraph 27 of the final report of the Preparatory Committee, the Conference was required to elect 20 Vice-Presidents, comprising 10 members of the Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States, 6 members of the Western Group and 4 members of the Eastern European Group.

17. The following candidates had been put forward on the basis of consultations in the regional groups:

- Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States: China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Malawi and Panama
- Western Group: Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Spain and Switzerland
- Eastern European Group: Croatia, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Slovenia

18. The agenda item would be kept open pending the nomination of a further two candidates from the Group of the Non-Aligned Movement and Other States.

19. **Mr. Vorontsov** (Russian Federation) said that he wished to draw the Conference's attention to the fact that one State was attempting to undermine the rights of the Russian Federation within the Eastern European Group, for purely political reasons. Its actions sought to discriminate against his country and unjustifiably restrict its inalienable right to participate in the work of the organs of the Convention, including the Bureau of the

Ninth Review Conference, and were motivated by a desire to undermine the constructive contribution of the Russian Federation to activities under the Convention. Such unscrupulous behaviour eroded the authority and effectiveness of the Eastern European Group and the Convention as a whole. The actions of the aforementioned State were also intended to goad his delegation into taking retaliatory steps and blocking the establishment of the Bureau. The Russian delegation would not yield to such provocation. To ensure the smooth running of the Conference and in view of other factors, including the financial difficulties that beset the Conference, his delegation had not objected to the other candidacies from the East European Group. Unlike the delegation of the aforementioned State, the Russian delegation was not motivated by ulterior motives, but rather by the success of the Conference and the adoption of a consensus-based final document.

20. In view of the current political situation and the anti-Russian policy implemented by the aforementioned State at all international forums, the situation in the Eastern European Group was unlikely to be resolved. The Russian Federation did not intend to reconcile itself to that situation but did not wish to hinder the substantive work of the Conference. For that reason, it had decided to withdraw from the Eastern European Group and to establish a new regional group under the Convention, which would be known as the "Group of One". States parties and the Implementation Support Unit should take his country's decision into account when organizing future work within the framework of the Convention. The new regional group had the same status as all other regional groups. The decision did not set a precedent or carry any consequences in terms of the activities of the Russian Federation within the organs of the United Nations or its membership in the group of Eastern European States in the context of the United Nations generally and should be reflected in the final document of the Ninth Review Conference.

21. **The President**, noting the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation, said that if there were no objections, he took it that the Conference agreed to elect the States parties named as Vice-Presidents by acclamation.

22. *The States parties named were elected Vice-Presidents by acclamation.*

23. **The President** said that Ambassador Tatiana Molcean of the Republic of Moldova had been nominated for the office of Chair of the Committee of the Whole, with Mr. Andreas Bilgeri of Austria nominated for one of the offices of Vice-Chair. Ms. Sara Lindegren of Sweden had been nominated for the office of Chair of the Drafting Committee. A representative of South Africa and Mr. Ali Sezgin Işılak of Türkiye had been nominated for the offices of Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, of the Credentials Committee.

24. *Ms. Molcean (Republic of Moldova) and Mr. Bilgeri (Austria) were elected Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, of the Committee of the Whole, by acclamation.*

25. *Ms. Lindegren (Sweden) was elected Chair of the Drafting Committee by acclamation.*

26. *A representative of South Africa and Mr. Işılak (Türkiye) were elected Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, of the Credentials Committee, by acclamation.*

27. **The President** said that not all positions had been filled. He urged the regional groups to complete the nomination process as soon as possible.

Credentials of representatives to the Conference

(a) Appointment of the Credentials Committee

28. **The President** said that, in accordance with rule 3 of the rules of procedure, the Conference was required to appoint five members to the Credentials Committee, in addition to the Chair and Vice-Chair. On the basis of consultations, he proposed the appointment of representatives of Finland, Kazakhstan, Serbia and the Republic of Korea, and the representative of a further State party still to be nominated. He took it that the Conference accepted the appointment of the States parties named.

29. *It was so decided.*

Confirmation of the nomination of the Secretary-General

30. **The President** said that, pursuant to paragraph 40 of the report of the Preparatory Committee, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had nominated Mr. Daniel Feakes, Chief of the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit, as provisional Secretary-General of the Conference.

31. He took it that the Conference wished to confirm the nomination.

32. *It was so decided.*

Programme of work (BWC/CONF.IX/3)

33. **The President**, drawing attention to the provisional programme of work contained in document BWC/CONF.IX/3, said that the programme was indicative only and required delegations to remain flexible in order to manage the work of the Conference in the most efficient manner. He took it that the Conference wished to adopt the indicative programme of work.

34. *It was so decided.*

Message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations

35. **The Secretary-General**, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that it was 50 years since the global community had stood as one and declared that the deliberate use of disease as a weapon was an affront to humanity. Recognizing that the Biological Weapons Convention affirmed the conscience of humankind and that it remained as important as ever, he invited the Conference to place peace at the forefront of its efforts to ensure that scientific advances were not exploited for hostile purposes. The Conference should also update its thinking on verification and compliance in order to address contemporary threats, considering that the world had changed dramatically over the previous five decades. Lastly, he stressed that the Conference should have the financial and human resources it needed to carry out its important work. It was time to close off every avenue to the development and use of biological weapons, bringing a definitive end to the threat that they posed.

36. **Ms. Nakamitsu** (Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs) said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had demonstrated the devastating harm that the spread of infectious disease could cause globally; had given greater prominence to biosafety and biosecurity; and had demonstrated the chaos that could ensue from the deliberate use of biological agents as a weapon of war or terror.

37. The Biological Weapons Convention served as the primary international framework for tackling the threat of biological warfare. It codified a strong and long-standing norm that the use of biological weapons was repugnant to the conscience of humanity. Fortunately no country now professed the desire to acquire biological weapons or claimed to need them for national security reasons. However, rising tensions around the globe had brought about a geopolitical crisis that was placing multilateral disarmament under great stress. The international community should therefore remain vigilant, especially as norms against the use of other prohibited weapons had been eroded in recent years.

38. The Ninth Review Conference presented a critical opportunity for States to come together to strengthen the Convention. They could do so by considering action in at least four areas. Firstly, they could give teeth to the Convention's provisions for supporting peaceful scientific cooperation, enhancing transparency in research and promoting beneficial applications of emerging technologies. States should establish robust mechanisms to support national implementation and to investigate and respond to alleged violations. Secondly, States should strengthen the secretariat of the Convention, endowing it with a dedicated staff with greater capacity to engage in outreach, assistance, cooperation, training and capacity-building. Thirdly, States should decide to adequately fund the aforementioned steps by agreeing to a significant increase in the Convention's budget. Fourthly, States should explore how to verify compliance with Convention obligations. It was necessary to engage with the next generation of biosecurity professionals on the question of how to leverage the tools of modern science to develop a politically acceptable verification protocol.

39. Despite current geopolitical challenges, she believed that the Conference could achieve substantive and meaningful progress, going beyond the status quo that had prevailed for many years. She encouraged all delegations to show flexibility and commitment, to negotiate in good faith and to keep in view, at all times, the larger aim, preventing the hostile exploration of biology.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11 a.m.