

Working Group on the Strengthening of 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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Agenda item 6

Identifying, examining and developing specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, and making recommendations to strengthen and institutionalize the Convention in all its aspects within the mandate of the Working Group

Enhancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as an Integral Part of the Institutional Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)

Submitted by Panama

1. The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which was negotiated from 1969 until 1971 and does not have any gender-related provision.
2. Since 2019, there has been an increased attention to gender considerations within the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), including statements at the Meetings of Experts, the Meeting of States Parties, the Preparatory Committee for the Ninth Review Conference and the Ninth Review Conference, UNGA Resolutions¹, research on potential sex-specific effects and gendered impacts of biological weapons², side events and informal exchanges exploring the relevance of gender perspectives in the BWC. Gender is becoming a topical issue for the BWC regime.
3. During the 2020 BWC Meeting of Experts on Institutional Strengthening of the Convention (MX5)³, the 2020 Meeting of States Parties⁴, the Preparatory Committee for the Ninth Review Conference⁵ and the Ninth Review Conference⁶, Panama submitted a working paper entitled “*Enhancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as an Integral Part of the Institutional Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)*”, which sought to develop a common understanding of the ways that gender equality and women's empowerment is relevant for the institutional strengthening of the BWC.
4. At the Ninth Review Conference, States Parties engaged in rich debates on gender-related matters and their relevance to the BWC in all its aspects, including the enhancement

¹ See UNGA Resolutions 74/79, 75/88, 76/67 and 77/95.

² See, for example, Dalaqua, Renata Hessmann, James Revill, Alastair Hay, and Nancy Connell. 2019. “*Missing Links: Understanding Sex- and Gender-Related Impacts of Chemical and Biological Weapons*.” UNIDIR, Geneva. <https://doi.org/10.37559/WMD/19/gen1>.

³ See document BWC/MSP/2020/MX.5/WP.6.

⁴ See document BWC/MSP/2020/WP.6.

⁵ See document BWC/CONF.IX/PC/WP.8.

⁶ See document BWC/CONF.IX/WP.48.



of gender equality through the full, equal and meaningful participation of men and women in all BWC-related activities, as well as the need to address the differentiated impacts of biological agents among women, men, girls and boys.

5. While these are welcome developments, BWC States Parties could consider further supporting gender equality and women's empowerment during the current intersessional programme and towards the Tenth Review Conference. Improving gender equality in the BWC is highly desirable, as it has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of BWC processes and their outcomes. Diverse teams are more innovative, take more sustainable decisions and are more effective in resolving impasses. Women and men have an equal right to participate meaningfully in negotiations and shape the decisions that affect their lives.

6. The Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention was established by the Ninth Review Conference with the aim to identify, examine and develop specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, and to make recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the BWC in all its aspects, to be submitted to States Parties for consideration and any further action.

7. In light of the above, the present working paper seeks to build on the active and valuable discussions addressing gender considerations that took place during the previous BWC review cycle, and presents, in a non-exhaustive manner, some practical recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the BWC in the framework of international cooperation and assistance, scientific and technological developments and national implementation measures.

I. International Cooperation and Assistance:

(a) Encourage State Parties in a position to do so to promote and fund capacity-building programmes under Article X that include gender analysis in the curriculum, such as traineeships, fellowships and mentorship programmes.

(b) Support the establishment of a fellowship programme for women diplomats in BWC, similarly to the "Women in Cyber" fellowship, in order to ensure equal and effective representation of women diplomats from all regions in the BWC meetings and to develop governance capacities and expertise in areas relevant to the BWC.

(c) Encourage States Parties to support and fund research under Article X on the differentiated impacts of biological weapons on women, men, boys and girls, in order to generate knowledge and building an understanding of sex-based differences in immune response to potential biological agents, as well as the potential similarities and differences between gendered implications in deliberate and natural outbreaks.

(d) Mainstream a gender perspective in all BWC existing and possible future initiatives related to Article X, including but not limited to the assistance and cooperation database, the action plan, the voluntary trust fund, the online platform to promote exchange of information and best practices related to biosafety and biosecurity frameworks and the international cooperation and assistance program.

(e) Include gender balance criteria to the selection process of candidates for the sponsorship programme in order to promote the overall equal representation of women and men in the BWC meetings.

(f) Promote scholarships for Master's programmes with internship opportunities with the aim to enable more women from around the world to pursue careers in life sciences, biosecurity and biosafety, science diplomacy and in other fields relevant to the BWC, similar to the IAEA Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme (MSCFP).

(g) Ensure gender-balanced mechanism to facilitate and support the full implementation of international cooperation and assistance under Article X.

II. Scientific and Technological Developments:

- (a) Consider gender aspects of science and technology research and development.
- (b) Monitor the advances in the field of science and technology to ensure that those do not reproduce existing gender bias.
- (c) Offer trainings for young girls and women to stimulate their interest in science, technology, diplomacy and in other fields relevant to the BWC in order to close the gender gap.
- (d) Engage in initiatives that combat harmful gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in the field of science and technology, including through the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the use of biological sciences and technology for peaceful purposes.
- (e) Ensure gender-balanced mechanism to review and assess scientific and technological developments relevant to the BWC.
- (f) Mainstream a gender perspective in the work of the mechanism to review and assess scientific and technological developments relevant to the BWC.

III. National Implementation:

- (a) Consider the integration of gender perspective and gender analysis in all aspects related to national implementation measures.
 - (b) Ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in national implementation efforts, including national initiatives addressing biological threats.
 - (c) Promote the empowerment of women, including through education, training, mentoring and capacity-building efforts to participate in the design and implementation of national measures under Article IV, and invite States Parties in a position to do so to voluntarily share good practices and experiences in that regard.
 - (d) Give greater attention to the possible impacts of biological weapons on women, men, boys and girls by promoting more sex-and age-disaggregated data and research to better understand the sex-specific effects and gendered impacts of biological weapons, as well as awareness raising activities.
 - (e) Mainstream a gender perspective in the design and development of national health protocols and national response strategy in the event of the use of biological or toxin weapons.
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