

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 of gender equality through the full, equal and meaningful participation of men and women in

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.



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, during the Second Meeting of Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, 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)*"⁷, which sought to build on the active and valuable discussions addressing gender considerations that took place during the previous BWC review cycle, with a special focus on international cooperation and assistance, scientific and technological developments and national implementation measures.

8. In this occasion, the working paper presents, in a non-exhaustive manner, some practical recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the BWC in the framework of confidence-building and transparency; compliance and verification; and organizational, institutional and financial arrangements.

I. Confidence-building and Transparency:

(a) Ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the preparation of annual reports on CBMs.

(b) Promote equal opportunities for women and men through training courses and capacity building activities on issues related to the Convention, including assistance in completing the CBMs forms.

(c) Invite States Parties in a position to do so to voluntarily share in a supplementary annex to the CBMs report information on policies, good practices and experiences in integrating a gender perspective and promoting gender equality in BWC implementation at the national level. For that purpose, States Parties could consider these possible guiding questions:

Does the State Party take into account gender considerations? Yes/No [If yes, respond the following questions where applicable]

- Mainstream gender perspective and gender analysis into the BWC implementation efforts: Yes/No
- Promote the full, equal and meaningful participation, representation and leadership of women in BWC-related activities: Yes/No
- Ensure equal opportunities and the empowerment of women through education, training, mentoring and capacity-building in life sciences, biosecurity and biosafety, science diplomacy and in other fields relevant to the BWC: Yes/No

⁷ See document BWC/WG/2/WP.23.

- Increase understanding of sex-specific effects and gendered impacts of biological weapons (training, workshops, research): Yes/No
- Advance knowledge of sex-related variations in immune and treatment responses to potential biological agents: Yes/No
- Collect disaggregated data by gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability and other characteristics related to outbreaks of infectious diseases and similar occurrences caused by toxins: Yes/No
- Monitor emerging technologies and potential agents that can target persons on the basis of sex, race or ethnicity: Yes/No
- Any additional relevant information as appropriate.

II. Compliance and Verification

(a) Ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in any potential body established to identify and consider verification measures, similar to the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts (VEREX) or the Ad Hoc Group;

(b) Include gender balance, along with expertise and geographical representation, as a criteria for the composition of a future verification mechanism (e.g., inspection or monitoring teams, interviewers) and other investigative mechanisms, taking into account that women and men may have access to different social spaces and stakeholders, thus improving information gathering and processing;

(c) Provide equal professional and educational opportunities for women and men in order to attain equitable representation and meaningful participation in verification-related activities;

(d) Mainstream a gender-responsive approach to training and capacity building initiatives related to verification, so as to prepare inspectors, interviewers and other relevant actors for culture- and gender-related situations;

(e) Support further data and analysis to increase understanding of the relevance of gender considerations in verification processes and other investigative mechanisms, including by developing tools, templates and procedures to collect sex and age-disaggregated data in such contexts;

(f) Apply a gender lens in the design, development and procurement of work equipment, tools and personal protective equipment (PPE) in order to guarantee that those are suitable for both women and men.

III. Organizational, Institutional and Financial Arrangements

- (a) Consider the integration of a gender perspective in all BWC machinery;
- (b) Appoint a member of the BWC Bureau as a gender focal point to:
 - Advise the Bureau on the integration of a gender perspective in the work and activities of the BWC;
 - Collect, track and publish data and statistics available on the participation of men and women in Convention formal and informal meetings, including as speakers, office-holders, members of the BWC Bureau and subsidiary bodies;
 - Address reports of harassment, including sexual harassment, during Convention meetings, in line with the Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN system events.

- (c) Adapt the ISU's mandate to allow it to support the work of the gender focal point;
 - (d) Advocate for a gender-balanced Bureau and subsidiary bodies in subsequent review cycles;
 - (e) Support the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in BWC meetings, activities and decision-making processes;
 - (f) Encourage delegations to set targets to strive towards gender-balanced delegations in current and future BWC meetings;
 - (g) Continue to add a gender component to projects implemented by the BWC ISU;
 - (h) Promote awareness raising activities and initiatives, such as the organization of informal seminars and webinars, focusing exclusively on advancing gender perspective in the BWC;
 - (i) Establish gender-inclusive networks that promote women in life sciences, biosecurity and biosafety, science diplomacy and in other fields relevant to the BWC for the purpose of exchanging experiences and discussing challenges and opportunities experienced by women in the field;
 - (j) If the ISU is further expanded, continue aiming for gender balance in the recruitment of the new staff;
 - (k) If an international agency for the BWC is created:
 - Promote gender balance in the agency's technical secretariat;
 - Form a Gender Task Team within the technical secretariat to provide support and training initiatives to encourage gender mainstreaming at every level of the agency.
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