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Statement

**Meeting of Experts of the Convention on the Prohibition of the
Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction**

18 August 2008

Chairman and Distinguished Representatives. We thank you for the opportunity to address this Meeting of Experts to the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention. Chairman, we congratulate you on the initiatives that you and the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) have taken to open space for additional participation by non-governmental organisations (NGO) in meetings such as this.

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) is an African policy research organisation that has offices in Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa. Mr Chairman, we note that the subjects for discussion are of direct relevance to our continent and to the work that we have been doing over the past few years under a project funded by the Royal Norwegian Government. This project aims to identify Africa's role in international efforts to strengthen disarmament and non-proliferation as they relate to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the context of Africa's developmental imperatives. Thematically, the project deals with the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba); the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC); the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC); and relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions such as UNSCR 1540.

Let us note here that ten of the 20 states that have not yet signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, and eight of the 13 who have signed but not ratified, are African.

We need to understand why many African states have invested so little in the BTWC. The most obvious reason is that biological weapons control is not a priority item on national, regional and continental agendas (outside of the reporting requirements for the UNSCR 1540). This is



something we are trying to address in the context of our membership of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP).

Chairman, we believe that any discussion about biosafety and biosecurity, which is a main subject of your deliberations this week, should be informed by the fact that scientific research and diagnostic research facilities remain under-resourced and under-developed on the African continent. While no comprehensive audit has been conducted to determine the number of laboratories in sub-Saharan Africa, in our experience, the laboratories that do exist often have insufficient biosafety measures. Improvement of biosafety procedures, rather than sophisticated and expensive biosecurity-related infrastructure, is in our view a pressing priority for the continent.

Chairman, in May this year the ISS and the Centre for International and Security Studies at Maryland University held a workshop in South Africa. The participants were senior scientists from 12 sub-Saharan countries. We believe it is important to bring to the attention of this meeting some of the conclusions reflected in a final statement issued by the scientists at the close of the meeting. The participants agreed, for example, [and I quote] that:

While there is a risk that human, plant or animal disease could be caused by an accidental or deliberate release of pathogens and products from African laboratories, our primary concern is not the intentional misuse of science to cause harm, but rather, the risk from natural disease outbreaks either originating on the continent or elsewhere. At the same time, there is an urgent need to develop and strengthen the capacity, both human and infrastructural, for life sciences research and diagnosis across the continent and to improve the safety practices at laboratories through the formulation of policy and legislation. African governments and scientific associations need to become more involved in national, regional and international discussions and deliberations about biosecurity, and to start developing and implementing policies that promote safe, responsible science.

Mr Chairman, turning to the second subject under consideration by this meeting, namely, education and awareness raising with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the BTWC.

It is our view that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and professional associations have a key role to play in raising awareness about dual-use concerns in the life sciences and in the development of educational material for scientists and science students.



Over the past few years, the ISS has partnered with the Universities of Exeter and Bradford in conducting seminars about dual-use issues and the life sciences. These seminars have been conducted at a number of academic and science research facilities in South Africa, Uganda and Kenya. We have found that very few scientists are aware of the matters under discussion in forums such as this. Indeed few are aware of the existence of the BTWC. Even more important for this forum, is the finding that most of the African scientists we have engaged with, once aware of the problem, are open to further discussion; recognise the importance of measures to reduce the risk associated with dual-use research; and, express support for the development of appropriate oversight mechanisms. It is clear that this dialogue with the scientific community should be continued and that significant efforts must be made to educate and sensitise policy makers, regulators, scientists and technical workers.

The ISS is committed to the development of educational materials which can be used to train scientists, science educators and students about the risks, rules and responsibilities associated with research, and in particular, the potential dual-use nature of such research. To this end, the ISS held a workshop at the end of 2007 that brought together academics, practicing scientists, government officials and international experts to design a short course for scientists. Since then, several institutions elsewhere on the continent have expressed interest in using the model to develop their own courses. From these experiences, it is possible to conclude that NGOs, with the support of states and professional associations, can play a positive role in promoting and facilitating education and raising awareness.

Chairman, we thank you for the opportunity to address the meeting and hope that your deliberations will be successful.

Thank you

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