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**Biological Weapons Convention  
Meeting of States Parties  
NGO Statements  
10-14 December 2012**



Mr Chairman:

The University of London\* greatly appreciates the opportunity to address the States Parties to the Convention.

We welcome one phrase in particular from your letter to States Parties dated 21 September. You asked for “ideas on how we can make the Meeting of States Parties, and the Intersessional Process in general, more responsive to the needs and aspirations of States Parties in genuinely improving the effectiveness of the Convention and reducing the risks posed by biological weapons.” **Genuine improvement** is the yardstick by which the outcome of this week will be judged. So we look forward to an outcome document in which genuine improvements are recommended. The mandate conferred on this MSP allows it, like previous MSPs, to report that it has reached consensus on conclusions or results – and these should embrace both common understandings and agreement on effective action.

Moreover, within the limits imposed by the Seventh Review Conference, the outcome document should be ambitious and comprehensive. It may well benefit from cross-fertilisation across the range of agenda items and topics. The aim should be a well-integrated treatment of this week’s varied subject matter: one which cuts across categories. For example, recommendations need to be agreed about education, awareness-raising and stronger structures and practices to encourage responsible behaviour among life scientists. Such recommendations will bridge the standing agenda items on science and technology and on strengthening national implementation.

Education can be about ‘implanting’ facts and knowledge, and instructing people in what to think. We believe, however, that in this context education is about something rather different. It is about ‘eliciting’ understanding and teaching people how to think for themselves. It is about equipping life scientists with sensitivity to the risk that the knowledge gained from the experiments and research they carry out can be misused.

A real commitment to this requires leadership from States Parties. To build a reinforcing synergy between the disparate and fragile educational activities we’ve seen to date, States Parties need to actively promote and fund collaborations between countries, institutions and individuals so that their experiences, achievements, problems and concerns can be shared.

But education is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end; in this case, to provide an avenue by which to affect behaviour. The ultimate aim is that life scientists behave responsibly, as well as provide a layer of oversight about the work carried out in their laboratories and in their specialized fields. The rapid pace and nature of change in the life sciences today means that anyone other than practising life scientists is hard pressed to have the sort of current, technical expertise required to provide adequate oversight. Education and awareness-raising efforts must, therefore, go hand-in-hand with the development of supportive structures and

professional practices for flagging any suspect activities or worrying advances in the field.

Mr Chairman:

There needs to be a common understanding that the Convention requires continual nurture at every level. Its strength rests in part on individual life scientists and the systems and safeguards where they work; on education to raise awareness of dual-use problems and structures to encourage responsible behaviour; on biosafety and biosecurity and all the elements of good practice for those engaged in relevant science and technology. But it rests also on national implementation within states and on international procedures between states for exchanging CBM information and providing compliance assurance through consultation and clarification. At every one of those levels the Convention requires continual nurture and strengthening.

But a common understanding is not enough. Effective action must also be agreed: action to strengthen structures wherever the treaty architecture or the practical application of the BWC shows signs of weakness, from the individual level to the international.

No one knows where the next threat to the Convention will come from: not even whether its source will be a state or a non-state entity or some malign combination of the two. That is a good, precautionary, reason for introducing genuine improvements to the BWC at every level, so that it is kept always as well prepared as human ingenuity can ensure, to respond effectively wherever the threat may come from. Biological disarmament requires perpetual vigilance.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

This week's Meeting of States Parties bears a heavy responsibility because its discussions and the conclusions or results it embodies in its outcome document will set the pattern for the rest of the Intersessional Process. We encourage you to aim high: to keep seeking genuine improvements which you can recommend in your report. We wish you a productive week and thank you for your attention.

**Mr Nicholas Sims**  
**Emeritus Reader in International Relations, London School of Economics & Political Science**

**Dr Filippa Lentzos**  
**Senior Research Fellow, Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine, King's College London**

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\* The University of London dates from 1836, and is a major component of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and beyond. It has evolved into a confederation of academically and financially autonomous colleges, which continue to share some central University of London institutions and a long history of joint endeavours in education and research. King's College London (founded 1829) was one of the two original colleges of the University of London. The London School of Economics & Political Science (founded 1895) became a college of the University of London in 1900.