Meeting 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
(BTWC)

Geneva, 6-10 December 2004

Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Chris Sanders, the Netherlands,
on behalf of the European Union

Geneva, 6 December 2004

(Check against delivery)
EU STATEMENT AT THE MEETING OF STATE PARTIES TO THE BTWC
(GENEVA, 6-10 DECEMBER 2004):

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

Allow me at the outset, Mr Chairman, to welcome you to the chair of this meeting. I am confident that under your capable and experienced leadership our work will achieve meaningful progress.

Mr Chairman,

The European Union attaches high priority to the reinforcement of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is the cornerstone of our efforts to prevent biological agents and toxins from being developed as weapons. The EU remains committed to develop measures to verify compliance with the BTWC.

The EU supports and promotes wholeheartedly the universal adherence to and the implementation of the objectives laid down in the BTWC. We welcome the recent accession to the Convention by Azerbaijan, and we hope other States will soon follow.

The EU has recently carried out demarches to most states not party to the Convention in order to encourage them to become a party to the BTWC as soon as possible. We encourage all States Parties to also raise the importance of universal adherence to the BTWC in their bilateral contacts. Recognising that 2005 will see both the 30th anniversary of the entry into force of the BTWC and the 80th anniversary of the Geneva Protocol opening for signature, the EU believes that States Parties should make a particular effort to promote progress to universality of these instruments. The EU stands ready to join diplomatic efforts to this end.

The EU is ready to consider requests for support by states with administrative or financial difficulties in their national implementation of the BTWC. The EU would welcome cooperation with other partners, or regional organisations to co-ordinate efforts and activities in this regard. The EU recalls that reinforcing its Cooperative Threat Reduction programs with other countries, targeted at support for disarmament, control and security of sensitive materials, facilities and expertise, is part of the its Strategy against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. CTR programs can also have a biological-weapon dimension.
Mr Chairman,

7. The European Union is fully supportive of the current working program. In the absence of negotiations on a verification mechanism much useful work remains to be done within the parameters of these intersessional meetings. The success thereof will be an important step in our common endeavour to strengthen the Convention.

8. Last year's meetings proved to be very useful and informative and provided a good basis for action on national measures to implement the Convention and national mechanisms to establish and maintain the security and oversight of pathogenic micro-organisms and toxins. We welcome the final report of last year's meeting. The EU is committed to work towards an equally positive outcome this year.

9. The two topics under consideration at this year's meetings in the context of the BTWC are important elements in the fight against biological weapons:

10. Effective national and international mechanisms for the surveillance, detection, diagnosis and combating of infectious diseases enable states to quickly identify outbreaks that are possibly the result of the use of biological weapons.

11. Effective national and international capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of such outbreaks, are the logical next step to countering the impact of the use thereof.

12. Taken together, well developed national and international mechanisms, and capabilities to detect and respond to disease outbreaks could constitute an extra barrier to the use of weaponised disease by States, or non-state actors. It would minimise the effects of such use, and increase the possibility of detection of the perpetrators, and of course, the role of such measures is self-evident in enhancing our response to the threat of natural outbreaks of disease.

13. The EU also welcomes the fact that by discussing these important topics amongst experts with a background in healthcare, agriculture, outbreak response, or forensics, these communities become increasingly aware of the security aspects of their work.

Mr Chairman,

14. When considering the mandate of this meeting, (the discussion and promotion of common understanding and effective action), the States Parties to the BTWC should focus on the particular actions that could be taken in the BTWC context. Duplication of efforts better addressed in other fora is unwelcome. Instead, we should make good and, if necessary, better use of already existing mechanisms.

15. We should not forget that the underlying motivation for the adoption of most measures related to the two topics under discussion this year are first and foremost the protection of health of individual humans, animals and plants as well as the protection against adverse effects on the world economy. Nor should we forget that discussions on measures, recommendations, or concrete actions to these ends take place in other international forums, and are probably well addressed there.
Mr Chairman,

16. In this context, the EU would like to express its satisfaction with the comprehensive exchange of information that took place at the expert meeting in July this year. It is clear that already a lot of work has been done by States Parties to the BTWC as well as international organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the Food and Agricultural Organisation in relation to the topics under discussion this year.

17. EU Member States underlined their support of the work of these international organisations. On a number of issues the EU already works closely together with these organisations. We intend to continue our close co-operation in the future.

18. At the Meeting of Experts, EU Member States have also made clear their support of the existing verification mechanisms and systems including existing mechanisms for investigations of alleged use.

19. The EU would welcome further discussion and follow on action on the proposals to review, amend or update the existing mechanism under the UN Secretary General for investigating cases of alleged use of biological weapons which was established on the basis of UN General Assembly Resolution 42/37C of 1987, and endorsed by the UN General Assembly in its resolution A/Res/45/57 in 1990, in order to render this mechanism more operational.

20. States Parties to the BTWC should encourage all States to continue developing effective mechanisms for surveillance and detection of disease outbreaks, to support the WHO, OIE, FAO and IPPC in their work, and encourage States to co-operate where possible in the response and mitigation of such outbreaks whether they occur naturally, or are the result of the use of a biological weapon.

21. States Parties to the BTWC should also encourage all States to continue developing and enhancing capabilities for investigating cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease.

Mr Chairman,

It is important that the States Parties to the BTWC do not stand at the sideline, but take the responsibility to address the concerns regarding biological weapons, and their potential use. The Review Conference in 2006 will be a good opportunity to agree on specific, practical and realistic measures to strengthen both the Convention itself and compliance with it.

Mr Chairman,

22. We welcome your efforts so far to work towards a positive outcome. In carrying out your task, you can rely on the full and consistent support of the European Union.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

* Croatia continues to be a part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.