



Delegation of Italy to
the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva

**Working Group on the strengthening of
the Biological Weapons Convention**

International cooperation and assistance

**Statement delivered by Amb. Leonardo Bencini,
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to the Conference on Disarmament**

23 August 2024

Thank you, Chair.

When discussing international cooperation and assistance, I could repeat many of the arguments I used yesterday when talking about science and technology.

The IX Review Conference debated both issues at length. In fact, we almost considered the possibility for the Review Conference to actually establish the two mechanisms there and then, with the details to be defined at a later stage. In the end, the Conference decided to develop with a view to establishing the two mechanisms. But the goal remains the same: the establishment of the mechanisms, that we believe should be achieved as soon as possible, as the Final Document states.

As far as ICA is concerned, the Final Document specified that the mechanism be open to all states parties. In fact, ICA was one of the key issues at the Review Conference, it was perhaps the catalyst for consensus on all other issues. The active involvement and interest of the delegations from many developing countries provided the necessary momentum. Significant progress was made then, I would say more than expected, and significant progress has been made since, within this working group. And let me take this opportunity to warmly thank the Friends of the Chair for the extraordinary work they have conducted, that has brought us much closer to consensus with the proposal we now have on the table.

The broad participation in yesterday's debate is yet another proof of the type of priority this issue receives from so many delegations but in particular from delegations of developing countries. And this is no surprise because the goal of an ICA mechanism

is to promote peaceful uses of biotechnology and life sciences to the benefit of those countries that most need this kind of support.

Italy views this mechanism as part of global efforts towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda, although from the point of view of a disarmament treaty. This is why we fully support the idea of establishing an ICA Fund that would benefit first and foremost lower and middle income countries. As far as the management of the fund is concerned, we have many examples from the UN system of how to ensure a balanced, impartial and mostly unearmarked funding and management. The proposal in the non paper – of a target amount to be set by the Review Conference – is a possibility but it is not the only one. In general terms, we think it is vital that most funding to this Fund be unearmarked or softly earmarked, that is directed towards specific programmes or initiatives that would have been previously approved by the Steering Group and not chosen ad hoc by a donor country, although this could also be a possibility but a residual one. And, most crucially, we should ensure national ownership of the funded projects.

We could support most of the elements of the non paper, including a role for the Meeting of States parties, but we would caution against creating a new layer of complexity with the creation of a Cooperation Advisory Group. It would make the whole system more rigid and the decision-making progress less effective.

As far as the steering group is concerned, we see the two options on the table concerning its composition and at this point in time we tend to favour option 2, the one that gives the MSP Chair the responsibility to choose the 21 States parties that would sit in the Steering Group taking into account regional distribution.

Finally, a general consideration, similar to the one I made yesterday on S&T. As in S&T, we have come a long way in ICA too. The proposal we have before us is the result of more than a year of consultations and goes a long way towards consensus. There are still some points to work out but it seems to us that there is a shared sense of what this mechanism should look like and how it should work.

We have a historic opportunity here, one that was provided by the momentum created at the IX Review Conference. Let us not waste it. Let us work from now until December with the goal of agreeing on a Special Conference to be convened in 2025 for the approval of the two mechanisms. This goal is within our reach.

It would really be regrettable if we missed this opportunity now. But let me be clear about it. This ICA mechanism is in every state party's interest, but even more so in the interest of developing countries. We could create an instrument that would not only strengthen the Convention but that would have a practical, positive impact on the capabilities of lower and middle income countries, that would put them in the condition to benefit from the latest technology, that would make part of the global ecosystem that the BWC is becoming as it moves closer to full universalisation.

I thank you Chair