



Press Release

20.11.01

FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION CONTINUES GENERAL DEBATE FOR A SECOND DAY

The Fifth Review Conference 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 this morning continued its general debate for a second day.

During this three-week session, States Parties will review the operation of the Biological Weapons Convention and will consider proposals to strengthen it. Currently, there are 144 States Parties to the Convention.

Addressing the meeting were representatives of Ukraine, India, Mexico, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, Bangladesh, Poland, and Argentina.

Statements

IGOR KHARCHENKO (Ukraine) said that Ukraine considered that the task of the Fifth Review Conference was to sum up the past five years of operation; to evaluate the latest scientific and technological developments; and to achieve a common understanding on those provisions of the Final Declaration. Ukraine was complying with its obligations under the Convention and annually submitted information on confidence building measures. However, the lack of a verification regime represented a serious obstacle for the full observance of the provisions of the Convention by States parties. In this connection, Mr. Kharchenko expressed a preference for multilateral cooperation in developing an international control mechanism as opposed to unilateral action.

In view of the current anthrax outbreaks in the United States, Mr. Kharchenko highlighted the effects of the threat or use of biological weapons on the psyche of the general public and the real threat of the use of biological weapons by terrorists or in military conflicts. He referred to initiatives Ukraine had put forward at the current on-going session of the UN General Assembly with regard to combating international terrorism, including the establishment of a structure under UN auspices to fight bioterrorism and to ensure implementation of appropriate legal measures.

(more)

Mr. Kharchenko reiterated Ukraine's support for the basic elements of the draft Protocol and regretted that the Ad Hoc Group had been unsuccessful in forging a consensus on it. However, Ukraine believed that the stalled status of the protocol negotiations should not result in the suspension of the development of a mechanism to verify compliance with the provisions of the Convention. In this respect, Ukraine was open to discussion on new proposals and was supportive of strengthening national legislation. It believed that the new proposal made by the United States could be considered within the context of further discussions on the draft Protocol and that these two elements, as well as proposals by other States Parties, could be combined in one single compliance control instrument for the Convention.

RAKESH SOOD (India) lamented the fact that, after over six years of negotiations on a draft Protocol within the Ad Hoc Group, States parties were now back to square one. He reaffirmed India's position that the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group remained valid, as did the need for a multilateral negotiating process to strengthen the Convention. There was a need to strengthen the norm against biological weapons, especially following enhanced controls on the production, acquisition, storage, handling and transfer of dangerous pathogens and international cooperation and assistance for dealing with the threat or use of biological weapons as key tasks. India believed that both a multilaterally negotiated legally binding instrument and national legal measures were essential.

Mr. Sood said India was willing to listen to and to study all new ideas and believed that doing so did not mean jettisoning the original mandate of the Ad Hoc Group. India supported the widest possible interpretation of Article I of the Biological Weapons Convention to take into account future scientific and technological developments. It believed that verification of Article I should mean verification in all its aspects. Equally, Sood affirmed India's support for strengthening of Articles III and V. India believed that the transfer of dual-use materials for medical, diagnostic and treatment purposes should be on the basis of guidelines accepted by all States parties. India underlined that a declaration should be adopted at the Fifth Review Conference, which would reaffirm the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group, facilitate the resumption of stalled negotiations, and add new measures to deal with the threat of biological weapons.

GUSTAVO ALBIN (Mexico) regretted that after more than six years of negotiations, with the international community investing much effort and resources, it had not been possible to establish a verification protocol for the Convention. However, multilateral negotiations in the framework of the Convention remained the most effective way to preserve and strengthen its provisions. In this regard, Mexico was willing to consider additional measures to strengthen the national legislation that penalized conduct contrary to the provisions of the Convention; to establish security standards on shipment and use of pathogenic microorganisms; to establish national oversight mechanisms for genetic engineering and biotechnology; and, to set up a professional code of conduct to regulate activities within the scope of the Convention.

SVERRE BERGH JOHANSEN (Norway) welcomed new proposals for combating the threat of biological weapons and further strengthening the Convention through a multilateral process. Nevertheless, Norway remained convinced that the Ad Hoc Group must continue its valuable work and carry out the mandate it was given by the States parties. Mr. Johansen also expressed Norway's support for proposals to strengthen the framework of the Convention with more regular meetings of the States parties and other types of inter-sessional work. In addition, Norway supported a proposal to include terrorism and public health in a future legally-binding instrument. As to the best way to strengthen the Convention, Johansen stated that a comprehensive, multilaterally negotiated universal agreement that included a broad range of confidence-building measures, and that strengthened verification and compliance with the Convention, represented the best way forward.

CHUNG EUI-YONG (the Republic of Korea) stated that, in view of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the on-going acts of bioterrorism in the United States, there was more urgency to take effective actions against the growing threat of use of biological weapons. The global fight against terrorism had underscored the renewed importance of a collective and multilateral approach in dealing with threats to international peace and security. This positive momentum, according to Mr. Eui-yong, should be carried forward in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly in the efforts to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention. He urged the Conference to explore various ways and means to reinforce and reinvigorate the Convention in a more constructive manner, and to come up with a practical outcome, combining the best elements of both existing and new ideas.

In this context, Mr. Eui-yong highlighted the following aspects: how various provisions in the Convention could be further elaborated to strengthen it; how the activities of the States parties during the inter-sessional period could be reinvigorated; and, how various approaches, both political and legal, to combat the proliferation of biological weapons and bio-terrorism could complement and reinforce each other. While affirming its observance of obligations and duties under the Convention, the Republic of Korea had elaborated comprehensive measures to cope with the new threat posed by bioterrorism and was in the process of enacting an anti-terrorism law to enhance the effectiveness of its domestic mechanism for combating terrorism.

DAVID BROUCHER (the United Kingdom) emphasized three key issues for the Convention: scientific and technological developments; compliance questions; and future measures. In terms of scientific and technological developments, Mr. Broucher suggested that, given the rapid advancement of technology and knowledge, the Review Conference should establish a mechanism for States parties to work together more frequently to conduct scientific and technical reviews and to consider any implications at the necessary level of expertise. In terms of compliance, the United Kingdom had submitted a background paper to the Conference, describing the steps it had taken domestically under Articles III and IV to enhance the implementation of the Convention.

In terms of future measures, Mr. Broucher outlined five proposals for consideration of the Conference: (1) to revive and expand the mechanism for investigations, including facility investigations, for alleged violations of the Convention; (2) to establish additional confidence building measures, including the task of making some of the existing measures mandatory, and a consultation process in which States parties could engage in a dialogue on the annual returns submitted by others; (3) to establish a more specific outline of the assistance elements for Article VII; (4) to increase spending and co-ordination on disease surveillance and on disease detection and diagnosis, which could be done through existing national and/or international efforts in conjunction with the WHO, FAO, and OIE programmes; (5) and to set up a scientific advisory panel to monitor scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention, which could meet at least annually to report to States parties on topics of relevance to the Convention and could also advise on the composition of any emergency stockpiles and assess any requests for emergency assistance in the event of a biological weapons attack or the threat of an attack.

TOUFIQ ALI (Bangladesh) stressed that the coverage of the prohibition in Article I of the Biological Weapons Convention should be comprehensive and applicable to any new scientific and technological development relevant to the Convention. Emphasizing the importance of universal adherence, he urged non-States parties to join the Convention and expressed Bangladesh's belief that there was a need to develop a protocol to implement the Convention and

to strengthen it. He also reiterated the need to strengthen confidence building measures. Mr. Ali called upon the Member States to strengthen Article X of the Convention, encouraging the exchange of bacteriological information and materials for peaceful purposes. Bangladesh was dismayed that the Ad Hoc Group had been unable to achieve consensus on a draft Protocol at its twenty-fourth session. Nevertheless, Mr. Ali stated that the recent anthrax attacks in the United States had further demonstrated the urgent need to strengthen the Convention.

KRYZYSTOF JAKUBOWSKI (Poland) recognized that the means for strengthening the Convention had become a key priority in recent years. He emphasized the need to focus on the means rather than on the forms of achieving this goal in order to create an effective mechanism to strengthen the Convention as soon as possible. In order to strengthen the Convention, Mr Jakubowski stressed the need to move forward by building on the achievement made so far by the Ad Hoc Group. In this regard, he also stressed the need for enlargement of the scope of close dialogue and cooperation with scientific and research institutions, enhancing their contribution to the effectiveness of the Convention.

HORACIO SOLARI (Argentina) indicated that, while it continued to be relevant in today's international political system, the Convention required specific and additional actions to be strengthened. At the same time, Argentina made reference to the Mendoza

Commitment of a number of South American States not to develop, transfer, stockpile or use biological weapons as a signal of the political will of these States in the area to support measures to fight the threat of biological weapons. Mr. Solari described the work of the Ad Hoc Group as a useful exercise in which, he said, many potentially useful measures for combating biological weapons were identified. He indicated that the Fifth Review Conference should revalidate the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group so that States parties could complete the political task of developing a verification regime to be considered at the Sixth Review Conference or at a special conference. Argentina expressed support for increased coordination of the control of the transfer of sensitive and dual-use technologies and increased transparency among Member States. Mr. Solari also expressed the desire of Argentina to see the adoption of common parameters for identifying weapons-applicable dual-use materials.
