

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF CUBA TO THE FIFTH  
REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS  
CONVENTION

GENEVA, 19 NOVEMBER - 7 DECEMBER 2001

Mr. President,

May I first express our delegation's satisfaction in seeing you presiding this Conference and its readiness to cooperate with you and the other members of the Bureau towards the success of our work.

Mr. President,

The United States has in actual fact forced us to move ten years back, to the times when possible verification measures for the BWC were, among others, being envisaged. I do not have to recall the stages of the process that led us to the 1994 consensus decision which made possible the establishment of the Ad Hoc Group that has been negotiating here, in Geneva, a Protocol to strengthen the Convention.

It is a paradox that the Ad Hoc Group negotiations were suddenly interrupted as a result of the action of a depository of the Convention, notwithstanding that the same State was one of the major advocates of that regime when, in 1969, it unilaterally renounced the possession of biological weapons. The United States' rejection of the Protocol was completely inconsistent with that delegation's strong previous demands to ease several of its clauses, only to reject it afterward invoking, among other reasons, its weakness.

It is difficult to believe that during all these years 143 States Parties to the Convention had been mistaken and did not understand that the Convention was unverifiable, according to the arguments wielded at the last minute by the United States. What is more, it seems that prestigious international scientific institutions, even including some from the United States, were also mistaken when, for several years, in parallel to the Protocol negotiations, they were offering their own ideas on possible verification measures.

We are aware that the verification of the compliance with the Convention is not an easy task, given the distinct nature of the matter regulated by this legal instrument. We also know that efforts deployed toward that end could not be reduced to an automatic extrapolation of measures and actions adopted within other specific disarmament and arms control frameworks, without taking into account the specificity of the biological and biotechnological fields.

However, the Ad Hoc Group negotiating framework not only included verification measures but also confidence-building and other transparency measures, and thus contributed to reduce the complexities inherent to verification. That framework had the added value of being multilateral, universal and free of discrimination, as well as of taking into account the specificities and interests of all States Parties regardless of size or power. We are convinced that the Ad Hoc Group mandate, as established by the 1994 Special Conference, remains fully valid.

Mr. President,

This Fifth Review Conference takes place at a complex point in international Relations, a time characterized by hostilities and tensions of all kinds, including the renewal of the threat of the use of biological weapons. Once again our challenge is how to face that threat and minimize the prospects of that type of weapons being used.

Cuba knows well what that threat means, having in several instances been victim of acts of aggression with biological agents. Virtually every crop, every agricultural and livestock production, with a high incidence on the food supply, has been subjected to attacks through the deliberate spreading of plagues in our territory, in what can be rightfully termed a "biological war". Even more baleful has been the use of biological agents to cause diseases in human beings.

Many of you will recall that, in March 2000- during the 19th session of the Ad-Hoc Group, the Cuban Minister for Foreign Affairs- Felipe Perez Roque, denounced some concrete cases of a long list of biological aggressions against our country:

- the unusual outbreak of African swine fever in 1971 and 1980 which led to the forced slaughter of 800,000 pigs and consequently damaged the country's economy;
- the introduction, in 1978, of the common sugarcane rust, which, for the 1980-1981 crop alone caused the loss of almost one million tons of sugar, our main export;
- the suspicious appearance, in 1979, of the tobacco blue mold, which during that year caused damages for almost 350 million dollars;
- the outbreak of the hemorrhagic dengue epidemic, which caused the death of 158 people, 101 children among them.

In many instances, the deliberate nature of those aggressions has been documented; In others, those who perpetrated them have explicitly acknowledged their responsibility.

On account of its painful experience as aggressed country Cuba took an early part in The efforts to strengthen the BWC in all its aspects, within a multilateral, universal framework that would take into account the interests of all the States Parties to the Convention.

Cuba realized from the very beginning that the purpose and role of the Convention Could not be made dependent upon the narrow interests of one State or of a small Group of States. Agreeing to that would slash the commitment that all the States Parties have accepted in becoming part of this regime and would have damaging effects beyond the Convention framework, since it would entail a loss of credibility in the present system of International Law.

Mr. President,

After the deplorable events of September 11th and their equally unfortunate consequences, Cuba condemned the terrorist attacks and expressed its solidarity to the American people. In an immediate response to the call by the United Nations Secretary General, my country informed him that it would ratify the 12 UN instruments on international terrorism.

At the same time, we have condemned the unilateral imposition by the United States of a senseless and brutal war, with total disregard for the most sacred principles of International Law. Cuba has repeatedly said that a truly effective and lasting alliance in the fight against terrorism can only result from a genuine international collaboration with the participation of all countries, big and small, with a thorough understanding of each other's positions, with broad-minded and tolerant approaches, within the frameworks of the United Nations and with unrestricted respect for the principles of its Charter. The proper method to eradicate terrorism is the coordination of actions not tie imposition of force. To eradicate terrorism means to defeat, among other factors, its causes.

In order to advance in this fight we should, overcoming hegemonisms and narrow national interests, be entirely honest in our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including bioterrorism and without excluding it when it is committed or protected by a State.

Cuba solemnly declares today that the fight against bioterrorism should not be detached from the premises of multilateralism, from our common goals and from a voluntarily concerted action. The principles that govern the present international system are in full force. A unilateral imposition of doubtful principles in order to wage the war against bioterrorism must not be allowed. Only multilaterally concerted actions, undertaken with manifest transparency and based on mutual trust, shall generate the results that the International Community expects for a future free from the use and the threat of use of biological weapons.

Cuba also states that an additional restraining factor against that threat would be a development based on the international cooperation for the peaceful use of technologies in the biological and biotechnological fields.

Mr. President,

The Fifth Review Conference faces a challenge: it either effectively moves forward toward the strengthening of the Convention or irreversibly sanctions its death. To accept the implementation of unilateral, selective and discriminatory measures and double standards which implicitly classify States Parties in "good" or "bad" actors, or to endorse the role of a Directorate of biotechnological powers whose industrial activities and biodefense capabilities would not be subjected to any sort of international supervision and which, at the same time, would arrogate themselves the right to decide who could have access to scientific and technological advances in the biological field and how, would deliver a fatal blow to multilateralism and to universality, which are essential components of the Convention.

Thank you.