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STATEMENT

by Ambassador Leonid A. SKOTNIKOV,
Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation
to the Conference on Disarmament,
Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation
to the Fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons

Geneva, 19 November 2001

Mr. Chairman,

The Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons is the first international agreement in the disarmament area which prohibits the whole class of weapons of mass destruction. Now after 26 years the Convention is still one of the most important elements of the international security system. In its statement dated 17 June 2000 the President V.V.Putin stressed that Russia is strictly adhering to the Convention's provisions and expects that all other States Parties will do the same.

The recent tragic events in the United States and the danger of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction are convincing us even more of the need of strengthening the Convention regime by adopting a multilateral legally binding document which the Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the Conventions has been working on during the last years.

We stand for creating a verification mechanism on a multilateral basis, developing a peaceful cooperation in the biological field and implementing measures of confidence and openness.

Mr. Chairman,

Now, a few words about measures we take on national level to strengthen the Convention regime. In the 1990s a set of laws and regulations were adopted, aimed at excluding the very possibility of conducting activities in violation of the Convention. Among them were the Presidential decree according to which it is not allowed to develop and implement biological programs in the Russian Federation territory in contravention of the Convention. The decree also introduced control measures over meeting the Convention's requirements. New provisions were included into the Criminal Code making it a crime to act contrary to the Convention. Respective additions were also introduced into the Customs Code of Russia. A number of regulations set strict control over the export of agents of human, animal and plant diseases as well as of "dual" use equipment. In the period after the IV Review Conference a Law on export control was adopted in Russia.

Russia considers that the creation of an atmosphere of openness and, respectively, the strengthening of confidence in the compliance with the Convention plays a positive role in increasing its effectiveness. Accordingly we attach great importance to the provision to the UN of information on biological facilities and activities related to the Convention. We are doing this on a timely basis and in full scope according to the established formats. As a depository we would like to call upon all States Parties to the Convention to provide complete respective information on a timely basis.

The adoption on the 6 of December 2000 by the Russian Federation of the law on removing the reservations made by the USSR with regard to the 1925 Geneva Protocol is an example of our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Convention.

The Russian Federation considers that it is important for the purpose of the strengthening of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Biological Weapons to develop a peaceful scientific and technical cooperation in the area of biology and biotechnology. Many Russian agencies are participating in the development and implementation of research biological programs designed for solving public health, veterinary and agricultural problems together with many firms, centers and institutes of different States.

A number of Russian agencies cooperate with the WHO, OIE, FAO serving as reference centers for these organizations.

Information on human, animal and plant diseases is being systematically provided to corresponding UN bodies.

To exchange scientific achievements Russia carries out annually international conferences, symposia on biological and biotechnological problems. including on works connected with pathogenic microorganisms and toxins.

Mr. Chairman.

Russia has always been consequently arguing in favor of strengthening of the regime of the Convention by creation of effective mechanism of control over its implementation in the form of a legally binding document (Protocol).

During the period before the BWC Fifth Review Conference Russia actively participated in multilateral negotiations on the elaboration of the Protocol to the Convention. As a result of significant efforts on the part of all the participants of the negotiations it had been possible to agree on the structure of the Protocol and a number of its most important provisions. We note with satisfaction that many Russian ideas and proposals have been reflected in the Composite Text of the Protocol prepared by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Group of States Parties to the Convention. We are of the opinion that after the text is improved it could serve as a good basis for the completion of the work on the Protocol.

At the same time we would like to emphasize once more the importance that we have been and still are giving to the inclusion of terminology and objective criteria into the Protocol.

Regretfully, due to the events at the last round of the negotiations well known to everybody present here they have not been completed in the due time. The Russian Federation is deeply concerned with this fact. We are of the opinion that the resulting situation with the Protocol may lead to a greater threat of spreading of biological weapons, and this means that there is a possibility that they may end up in the hands of terrorists.

The participants of the Conference have to find a solution to the difficult task of getting out of the current situation. On our part we are still of the opinion that the adoption of the Protocol to the Convention is the most important and the most effective mean of strengthening it. We are prepared to consider in the Ad Hoc Group any additional measures designed to strengthen the Convention.

We are convinced that multilateral negotiations on elaboration of the Protocol within the Ad Hoc Group of BWC States Parties should be continued. In our opinion only a multilateral format of the negotiations would allow to take into account the interests of all the States Parties to the Convention and ensure the effectiveness and universality of the legally binding document which is being developed. We consider to be important that States with the most developed biotechnological industry should participate in such negotiations. To continue the negotiations it is not necessary to introduce any changes to the mandate[^] of the Ad Hoc Group - the old mandate is still valid. It reflects in a balanced way various priorities of States Parties and clearly indicates the directions of future negotiations. We hope to have support of States Parties to the Convention on this issue which, from our point of view, is of crucial importance.

In our view the whole set of measures which have been discussed earlier, as well as new ideas designed to strengthen the Convention could become the subject for the Ad Hoc Group meeting which in our opinion should be planned for as early as the first half of 2002.

In conclusion as representative of the depository state of the Convention I would like to call upon the States which have not yet become Parties to the Convention, to do so immediately. The real universality of the Convention will strengthen even more the security and stability on the Planet.

Thank you.