

SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION  
TO THE FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE  
CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT,  
PRODUCTION, AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL  
(BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

STATEMENT  
BY  
PETER GOOSEN  
CHIEF DIRECTOR: PEACE AND SECURITY  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, PRETORIA

GENEVA

19 NOVEMBER 2001

Check against delivery

Mr President.

On behalf of the South African delegation. I would like to extend our congratulations to you on your appointment to preside over this Review Conference. My delegation would also extend its congratulations to the other office bearers on their appointment. I assure you of my delegations co-operation with yourself, and with other delegations, to ensure that our work is taken up substantively, and that we are able to conclude successfully.

The Fifth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention comes at a particularly important " if not critical " juncture in the Convention's history.

At the 24th Session of the BWC Ad Hoc Group, the Ad Hoc Group was not only unable to reach an agreement on the draft Protocol " which had been negotiated to strengthen the implementation of the Convention - but it was also not even able to reach an agreement on its report to the States Parties.

On 11 September 2001. the world was confronted by the horrendous terrorist attacks in the United States, which have subsequently been followed by the most widespread use of biological weapons as an instrument of terror in recent history. The use of disease " in this case anthrax -- as a weapon of terror should not only be condemned in the strongest possible terms, but should also have been instrumental in underlining the importance of the work that had been undertaken to negotiate a legally binding Protocol to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. These attacks make a clear statement to the entire international community, and particularly to the BWC States Parties. The threat of disease as a weapon of war and terror " the threat of biological weapons -- is not speculative, it is a threat that is a "clear and present danger', which makes the Ad Hoc Group's failure all the more regrettable.

Mr President.

The threat of disease as weapons of war and terror remains an issue of concern for my country; as does the need to combat disease and its debilitating impact on the socio-economic development of countries around the world, and especially in Africa. Our demonstrated commitment during the Ad Hoc Group negotiations was therefore to ensure that the implementation of the BWC was strengthened, and that our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons was strengthened. We also continue to believe that this is not a commitment or a goal that can only be undertaken by individual States or groups of States acting on their own. If our opposition to biological weapons is to be sustained in the long term, it is necessary that the members of the international community - as a whole - take action and commit themselves to strengthening the norm against the development, production, stockpiling and use of these reprehensible weapons. South Africa continues to see the strengthening of the implementation of the BWC as a core element of the international security architecture. We believe that this objective remains possible and that legitimate concerns can be addressed in a satisfactory manner. It is in the abovementioned context that South Africa will study all proposals related to the strengthening of the Convention -- an issue which we are expecting to be one of the most important that we will need to consider at this Review Conference. The failure of the States Parties participating in the Ad Hoc Group "... to fulfil its (the Ad Hoc Group's) mandate ... with a view to completing it as soon as possible before the commencement of (this) the Fifth Review Conference and submit its report, which shall (was to) be adopted by consensus, to the States Parties, to be considered at a Special Conference" was extremely unfortunate, and in our view sent the incorrect message out into the world.

Mr President.

The Convention does not only provide a means to strengthen our security. It also contains an important technical co-operation and assistance provision, which enhances the international community's fight against the debilitating impact of disease on our peoples and on the socio-economic development of our countries. The draft Protocol, and the provisions that were contained in Article 14 of CRP.8. provided for further tools

in the fight against disease. As an African and developing country. South Africa - of course - placed an emphasis on the benefits that would have been achieved for the continent of Africa, and for the countries of the South as a whole. Disease, however, knows no boundaries - especially in the modern world, with its advanced systems of communication and travel - and the countries of the developed world would also have taken full benefit from the fight against disease, which would have been assisted by the provisions of CRP.8's Article 14. We have seen outbreaks of highly contagious diseases, which strike fear into the hearts of all our peoples and which impacts on our economies. Delegations may have learnt of the recent adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This Partnership, which found its origin in Africa itself, has as a core element the fight against disease, which has played a debilitating role in Africa's development. My delegation will therefore be looking to see how tools, such as those that were provided for in CRP.8's Article 14, which will not only assist Africa in this undertaking, but which will also assist all other States Parties - whether they find themselves in the developing South or the developed North -- can be included in the outcome of this Review Conference.

Mr President,

In terms of the arrangements for the Review Conference, South Africa provided the Secretariat with a paper on scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention — which has been included in background documentation prepared for this Conference. The focus of the paper was to underline that in all of the work related to the BWC, the threat against plants (and also animals) is usually considered to be of a lower priority or importance than the threat against humans. Issues related to plants (and also animals) are either not addressed, or it is reasoned that plants (and also animals) are more difficult to protect.

This situation occurs despite the fact that major elements of all past biological weapons programmes since the 1920s were directed against crops: and that numerous plants pathogens have been researched, developed and produced as weapons. A variety of delivery systems, specifically for anti-crop warfare, were also researched and developed.

Plant inoculants and biocontrol agents are two elements that play a role in the threat against plants, in the sense that they have the potential of being easily diverted into biological weapons. As in the case of human and animal vaccines, they are also produced in facilities that by their nature have the capability of producing biological weapons.

To give effect to the conclusions reached in the paper, the South African delegation has submitted a Working Paper for the consideration of this Review Conference. The Working Paper, which is entitled "Strengthening Confidence-Building Measures", notes that the CBMs, as defined by the Third Review Conference, provide only for declarations relevant to humans in terms of research facilities and production facilities. It is consequently proposed that similar facilities working with animal or plant pathogens, which are equally relevant to the Convention, should also be declared in the CBM declarations. Specific drafting proposals are made in the paper for amendments to be made to the CBM format text, and it is our hope that other delegations will study these proposals with a view to their agreement.

Mr President,

As I noted at the start of this statement, the Fifth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention comes at a particularly important - if not critical "juncture of the BWC's history. It would be an understatement to say that South Africa was disappointed:

- At the outcome of the Ad Hoc Group's negotiations for a Protocol to strengthen the Convention;
- At the failure of the Ad Hoc Group to meet the target date/deadline that the Ad Hoc Group, and all of the States Parties to the Convention, had agreed to for the conclusion of Group's work: and,
- At the failure of the Ad Hoc Group to reach an agreement on its report to the States Parties.

The threat that biological weapons, however, hold for the entire international community has been more than amply demonstrated in the recent past. The necessity at this Review-Conference is therefore for all States Parties to approach our work in a constructive way and to co-operate so as to accomplish our common goal, and for us to satisfy the aspiration of the international community — as a whole - to do all in our power to prevent the use of disease as weapons of war and terror.

Mr President, I thank you.