

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
MESSAGE TO THE FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE
OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION
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It gives me great pleasure to convey my greetings to the Fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention.

One hundred and forty-four States have now undertaken the commitment never, under any circumstances, to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain biological or toxin weapons. They have rightly recognized that the use of biological agents and toxins as weapons would, in the words of the Convention's Preamble, "be repugnant to the conscience of mankind".

Preventing the use or threat, of use of biological agents and toxins is more important than ever. The horrific attacks of 11 September in the United States could have been far worse if weapons of mass destruction had been used. The challenge for the international community is clear to implement, to the fullest extent possible, the prohibition regime offered by the Convention.

Significant obstacles must be overcome if we are to realize this goal. Despite great effort, the States Parties were unable to conclude work on a draft Protocol that would address key issues such as the lack of a compliance mechanism, the need for increased transparency, and cooperation for the peaceful uses of biotechnology. The Convention lacks universality. Only a limited number of States Parties provide information as a confidence-building measure. And in recent weeks the world has seen the use of biological agents to create chaos and terror, violating the international norm.

Full implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention must be given higher priority. Relevant national legislation needs to be tightened, and the acquisition or use of these weapons needs to be criminalized. The international community also has to be prepared to assist Member States should prevention fail. The United Nations, for its part, stands ready to play a coordinating role in this regard.

The renewed global focus on terrorism has brought concerns about biological and toxin weapons to the fore. Missing this opportunity, given difficulties in negotiations on other weapons of mass destruction, would only exacerbate the current crisis in multilateral disarmament diplomacy in general. I urge you to come together, overcome your differences, and take these next crucial steps in the history of this landmark convention. Please accept my best wishes for a successful conference.