

SIXTH REVIEW CONFERENCE ON BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION
CONTINUES ITS GENERAL DEBATE
20 November 2006

The Sixth 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 Their Destruction continued its general debate this afternoon, hearing speakers raise issues related to undertaking a thorough article-by-article review of the Convention; strengthening confidence-building measures; the importance of the Convention as a multilaterally-negotiated instrument; the need to tackle the current limitations to oversee implementation, and the importance of universalising the Convention and removing reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

Some members stated that the Sixth Review Conference provided the States parties with the first opportunity to do a thorough article-by-article review of the Convention since it was done in 1996. This was very significant, especially in the light of developments that had taken place in the international arena over the last ten years. It also provided an opportunity to strengthen this important part of the international disarmament and non-proliferation infrastructure. They noted that the threat of disease being used as a weapon remained an issue of serious concern.

On strengthening confidence-building measures, some delegations said that it was an important dimension of States parties' implementation of the Convention. At present, the participation rate in confidence-building measures submission was still very low. Therefore, States Parties were called upon to submit their confidence-building measures voluntarily and in a timely fashion.

A number of delegations attached great importance to the multilaterally negotiated instruments on weapons of mass destruction, including the Biological Weapons Convention, that were essential for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security. Therefore, it was believed that multilateralism and multilaterally agreed solutions, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, provided the only sustainable method of addressing disarmament and international security issues. In this context, speakers said States parties should pave the way to make the Sixth Review Conference a successful event which produced a comprehensive and balanced final declaration.

The Conference offered a timely opportunity to review the operation of the Convention and to provide the assurance that the purposes and intent of the Convention were being realised, some speakers said. It should be strengthened, mindful of its limitations in that it lacked an institutional capacity to oversee implementation, verify compliance with its obligations, and enforce the norm of non-development, non-production, non-possession and non-use of biological warfare agents. The Conference should therefore decide on further measures to buttress the Convention to meet emerging challenges, including measures to ensure full implementation and compliance with its provisions.

Some States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention underlined the importance of achieving the universalisation of the Convention, as well as calling for the

immediate withdrawal of all reservations dealing with the 1925 Geneva Protocol on the Prohibition of the use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare.

Speaking this afternoon were the representatives of Iran, South Africa, China, Argentina, Pakistan, Norway, Holy See, India, Brazil, Libya, Peru, Chile, Ukraine, Serbia, and Georgia.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 21 November at 10 a.m.

Statements

ALI REZA MOAIYERI (Iran) attached great importance to the multilaterally negotiated instruments on weapons of mass destruction, including the Biological Weapons Convention, that were essential for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security. Therefore, Iran believed that multilateralism and multilaterally agreed solutions, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, provided the only sustainable method of addressing disarmament and international security issues. In this context, they should pave the way to make the Sixth 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 Their Destruction a successful event and to produce a comprehensive and balanced final declaration.

Iran believed that the effective contribution of the Convention to international and regional peace and security would be enhanced through universal adherence to the Convention. Iran also called upon States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention to remain committed to their obligations not to transfer equipment, materials (including biological agents and toxins), as well as scientific and technological information to non-States parties.

Iran continued to strongly believe that the only sustainable manner of strengthening the Convention was through multilateral negotiations aimed at concluding a non-discriminatory legally binding agreement. Iran was deeply disappointed that due to the opposition of a single State party, namely the United States, the endeavours of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention to strengthen the implementation of the Convention had so far failed to bear fruit and the results of seven years of negotiations on a legally binding instrument could not be finalized.

Iran categorically rejected what the United States delegation stated about the country. These baseless allegations were contrary to the cooperative spirit of this Conference as well as the articles of the Convention. The current American Administration had totally failed in multilateralism in general, and in particular related to disarmament.

TALENT DUMISILE MOLABA (South Africa) said the Sixth Review Conference provided the States parties with the first opportunity to do a thorough article-by-article review of the Convention since it was done in 1996. This was very significant, especially in light of developments that had taken place in the international arena over the last ten years. It also provided an opportunity to strengthen this important part of

the international disarmament and non-proliferation infrastructure. The threat of disease being used as a weapon remained an issue of serious concern. This was not a commitment or a goal that could only be undertaken by individual States or groups of States acting on their own: if opposition to biological weapons were to be sustained in the long term, it was 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.

The strengthening of the implementation of the Convention was a core element of the international security architecture. This objective remained possible, and legitimate concerns could be addressed in a satisfactory manner, and the strengthening of the Convention was therefore the main objective of the Conference. The Convention not only provided a means to strengthen security: it also contained an important technical cooperation and assistance provision that enhanced the international community's fight against the debilitating impact of disease on peoples and on socio-economic development. Disease knew no boundaries, and all the countries of the world should join hands to win the fight against infectious disease. It was important, during the discussion, to take into consideration the areas in which the bio-sciences were still lacking, in particular in terms of the fight against infectious disease.

CHENG JINGYE (China) said that the Conference should review the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention in the past five years and outline follow-up actions to strengthen the effectiveness of the Convention under the multilateral framework. It was the basic obligation of States parties to put legislation in place covering all prohibition provisions of the Biological Weapons Convention. At the Meeting of States parties in 2003, all parties agreed that a State party should review, promulgate and improve its national legislation. States parties agreed to adopt comprehensive and specific national measures and provide international legal and technical assistance among them to enhance counter-bioterrorism capability and promote bio-safety.

Conducting confidence-building measures was an important dimension of States parties' implementation of the Convention. At present, the participation rate in confidence-building measures submission was still very low. China called upon more States parties to submit their confidence-building measures voluntarily and in a timely fashion. China would actively engage in discussions on how to improve measures on confidence-building measures.

In recent years, biotechnology had been playing an ever-increasing important role in improving mankind's health and the environment. However, the potential danger of abusing and misusing it was also on the rise. While enjoying the achievements in the development of biotechnology, it had become a common challenge to the international community on how to strictly and comprehensively implement the Convention and prevent the threat of biological weapons. China had fully elaborated its standpoints in this regard in its national report.

MARCELO VALLE FONROUGE (Argentina) said the commitment of Argentina to non-proliferation of biological weapons was based on previous statements including the declaration of MERCOSUR as a zone of peace. Argentina had taken an active role on this issue internationally. Last October, Argentina had submitted a national

document containing information relating to new scientific and technical developments that were relevant under the Convention. The results achieved at the regional experts meeting looking at weapons under humanitarian law in Buenos Aires this year were welcomed. Among its objectives was information exchange on work undertaken with regards to the mandate of the Convention.

Strengthening the Convention, which was a permanent goal, was also reflected in a whole series of statements issued by Latin American countries. Today, five joint working papers were being submitted for the review of the Conference, and these five documents had a common denominator, namely they contained a positive, constructive approach, which aimed to strengthen the Convention in a realistic way. A close look should be given to the threat posed by terrorism, and there was a need for strict controls of bio-capability which could lead to the construction of weapons of mass destruction. Failure or the cessation of work on the tasks under the Convention would send a negative signal to the international community, and would be a disturbing factor of concern.

TEHMINA JANJUA (Pakistan) said that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and Their Destruction was a key disarmament treaty that underpinned the international security architecture. It reflected the commitment of the international community to non-proliferation and disarmament of biological and toxin weapons. The Biological Weapons Convention effectively prohibited the use of biological and toxin weapons. Pakistan was fully committed to these obligations.

The Biological Weapons Convention's intersessional process of meetings had kept the multilateral track alive, but the Convention continued to be challenged by the absence of a mechanism for verification of faithful and effective compliance. A number of States parties had continuing interest in examining this issue. As they waited for agreement in this area, Pakistan said that they should make national implementation effective and enhance scientific and technical cooperation. Universal adherence to the Convention and access of all States to the Biological Weapons Convention was critical to address the challenges to this regime. States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention should draw up a plan on how to bring non-party States within the ambit of the Convention.

Terrorism affected all nations and societies today. They were all aware of the threat of the use of biological weapons with their potential to kill indiscriminately and massively. They had to prepare for such a contingency. The Biological Weapons Convention should become a framework for cooperation among nations to eliminate biological weaponization and to fight bio-terrorism.

KNUT LANGELAND (Norway) said the Sixth Review Conference provided an opportunity to demonstrate that multilateralism was working in the disarmament and non-proliferation sphere. All delegations should do their utmost to reach consensus on an outcome document. However, this last was not an aim in itself. A forward-looking consensus should be sought which would help the international community to deal with the growing risk of the hostile use of biological materials. The norms set out in the Convention and in the 1925 Geneva Protocol should be consolidated. In this respect, deliberations should be based on the good work done under the work

programme adopted in 2002. The positive momentum should be built on.

There was a need for an intersessional programme of work, to allow States parties to address both existing and emerging challenges. Confidence-building measures should be refined and improved. There was a clear need for greater efforts to universalise the Convention. There should be more dialogue on how to promote implementation of Article X of the Convention. Preventive measures, such as codes of conduct for those involved in the life sciences, should be developed. There should be further strengthening of response and investigation mechanisms for cases of alleged use of biological weapons. States parties should also be adequately served by a well-functioning support unit.

SILVANO TOMASI (Holy See) said that the Holy See was convinced that the prohibition of biological weapons was a fundamental element in the construction of peace and security for the whole human family. In addition, the Holy See stated that taking into account the failure of the Fifth Review Conference, States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention were facing a challenge in which its stakes were very high for the whole of humanity, and only its success could be envisioned. This Review Conference offered an opportunity to States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention to reinforce the norms established by the Convention.

The universalisation of the Convention should be a priority for States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention. No State should remain outside of this Convention, and no excuses should be valid. Therefore, this should be translated into cooperation and good faith that went beyond the commercial and economic interests of different States. To make the Convention effective, it was vital that States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention gave priority to transparency and the adoption of measures aiming at reinforcing confidence. No State on its own would be capable of winning the war against the proliferation of biological weapons.

JAYANT PRASAD (India) said the Convention was the first comprehensive disarmament instrument through which the international community had committed itself to eliminating an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Advances in biotechnology, genetic engineering and life sciences, especially in the past two decades, their dual-use nature and easier access to them, had increased the danger of proliferation and hostile use of biological warfare agents. The possibility that non-State actors, including terrorists, could acquire and resort to the use of biological warfare agents and toxins had added a new dimension to this danger, which should be taken into account in the deliberations.

The Conference offered a timely opportunity to review the operation of the Convention and to provide the assurance that the purposes and intent of the Convention were being realised. It should be strengthened, mindful of its limitations in that it lacked an institutional capacity to oversee implementation, verify compliance with its obligations, and enforce the norm of non-development, non-production, non-possession and non-use of biological warfare agents. The Conference should therefore decide on further measures to buttress the Convention to meet emerging challenges, including measures to ensure full implementation and compliance with its provisions. As bio-terrorism presented today the gravest threat to the Convention, the intersessional process should consider proactive and purposive measures that States parties

could take for the effective prohibition and prevention of acquisition of biological agents by terrorists, and for ensuring bio-security.

ANTONIO DA ROCHA PARANHOS (Brazil) said that the task that the States parties to the Sixth Review Conference to the Biological Weapons Convention had ahead of them was of utmost importance and the stakes were high. Five years ago, they had the opportunity to advance negotiations and to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention. Nevertheless, bridging the gaps between the stakeholders had become a Herculean task, which eventually led to an impasse, frustrating all those parties that engaged in the negotiations with a constructive spirit. Now a new window of opportunity was open and simply could not be missed. The time was ripe for them to move forward towards biological disarmament and non-proliferation.

Article X, paragraph 2, of the Biological Weapons Convention was very clear when it said that the Convention “shall be implemented in a manner designed to avoid hampering the economic or technological development of State Parties” for peaceful purposes. Only a strengthened Biological Weapons Convention would be able to comply with this objective. In that sense and as a way to preserve the integrity of the Convention, Brazil believed that there should be no overlap between the rights and obligations under the Convention and other international organizations or conventions. Nevertheless, the international community, in general, and Brazil, in particular, was concerned about the possible misuse of biological research. The harmonization between security concerns and access to technological advancements was an issue that should be addressed by the Review Conference.

MOHAMMED MANSOUR ELCHERIF (Libya) said the challenges faced by the Biological Weapons Convention compelled all to coordinate between themselves, to concert positions and develop capacities, creating new mechanisms in order to strengthen the standing of the Convention and guarantee the interest of the States parties, and deal effectively with all the challenges facing the implementation at the international level. States parties were called upon to shoulder their responsibilities towards the Convention, and to show sufficient flexibility in order to reiterate recommendations and resolutions that served the purpose of the Convention. Biological disarmament was a noble objective, and the Convention had been seeking this objective for many decades. When speaking of biological weapons, there should be no confusion between weapons programmes and the use of biological sciences for peaceful purposes, which was the right of all countries.

International peace and security could not be achieved through the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, or through the threat of the use of these weapons, but through the entrenchment of the principles of dialogue and cooperation, between all peoples of the world, and the promotion of development, combating hunger, disease and poverty. All countries of the world should accede to the Convention. The dangers of weapons of mass destruction reaching the hands of terrorists remained, and little concrete progress had been made. Libya was fully committed to the letter and spirit of the provisions of the Convention, and worked in full transparency and cooperation with the States parties. Hope remained that the Conference would lead to an experience of information and exchange, which would help other States parties to fulfil their commitments under the Convention.

ENRIQUE ROMAN-MOREY (Peru) reaffirmed Peru's firm commitment to the purposes and provisions of the Biological Weapons Convention to prohibit the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. Likewise, Peru underlined its commitment to the fight against weapons of mass destruction, which showed prominently in the Tlatelolco Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It was then of the utmost importance to take this opportunity to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention by supporting all the initiatives aimed at facilitating the universalisation of the Convention, as well as calling for the immediate withdrawal of all reservations dealing with the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Peru would support all efforts in this respect, and aligned itself with the proposals made through a document submitted by a group of Latin American countries.

SLOBODAN VUKCEVIC (Serbia) said Serbia continued to attach high priority to the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention as the basis of common efforts and means to prevent proliferation of biological and toxin weapons and counter the threat of the development of biological agents and toxins as weapons. Serbia remained committed to developing measures to verify the Biological Weapons Convention compliance. Serbia underlined the importance of strengthening the universality of the Biological Weapons Convention membership. In addition, Serbia fully supported the improvement of the process of its implementation at the regional and national levels. Universalisation of the Biological Weapons Convention was not sufficient in itself and should be accompanied by full national implementation of all its provisions.

Serbia pointed out that it fulfilled its obligations under the United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) as part of global efforts to prevent proliferation of all types of weapons of mass destruction. Serbia had submitted national reports that contained a list of national laws and other measures to prevent the proliferation of such items. Correspondingly, Serbia had started preparations for the adoption of the Law on Biological Weapons Convention implementation according to the model of the implementation law of the Chemical Weapons Convention adopted in 2005. Serbia had taken the first steps towards the creation of the framework of a future law.

LELA BAKANIDZE (Georgia) said that a three-pronged strategy of national, bilateral and multilateral measures for combating the biological weapons threat were recognized at the Fifth Review Conference in November 2002. As the representative of the anti-plague system of the post-Soviet countries, Georgia assured States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention that this strategy was very productive in reaching the goals of the Biological Weapons Convention. At the national level, Georgia was undertaking efforts to elaborate legislation to improve biosafety and biosecurity.

Today the interest of perpetrators in the use of especially dangerous pathogens had increased. In order to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, it was very important to keep especially dangerous pathogens in well-equipped safe laboratories. The Government of the United States had provided Georgia with tremendous support in this field.

Georgia considered very important the adoption and enforcement of effective export control measures by requiring all States to criminalize proliferation under United Nations Security Council resolution 1540.

EVHEN BERSHEDA (Ukraine) said that as a co-author of the Biological Weapons Convention, Ukraine was clearly aware of the importance of the role that the treaty had played during the last decade and was continuing to play as part of international legal documents in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, in the period between the Fifth and Sixth Review Conferences, Ukraine had become party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol on the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. Despite the age of the Protocol, its relevance continued to be undiminished.

It was vital to establish a unified mechanism to ensure the effective control of the implementation of the Convention bearing in mind the increased threat of the use of biological and toxin weapons for terrorist purposes. Ukraine also believed that it was necessary that the international community implemented measures and intensified its efforts to increase the effectiveness and, equally important, achieve the universality of the Convention, as well as of its regime as a powerful tool to control the proliferation of biological weapons.

Ukraine shared the view there should be a further intersessional work programme. This programme should deal with some of the following issues touching upon the strengthening of the effectiveness of confidence-building measures; developing adequate measures for the control of the Biological Weapons Convention's compliance; introducing the implementation of national legislation; dealing with new challenges and threats for the Biological Weapons Convention stemming from the latest scientific and technological developments in the spheres of biology and biotechnology; and countering bio-terrorism.

JUAN MARTABIT (Chile) said the Sixth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, like other meetings of similar importance, gave the opportunity to review the functioning of the instrument and guide future work, and this opportunity should not be missed. Chile was unswervingly committed to the objectives and purposes of this very important disarmament instrument, and had expressed this on numerous occasions. A range of documents, as raised by Argentina, had been submitted. There was a critical need to withdraw reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and to encourage and support the universality of the Convention. The number of States parties should be at least equal to the membership of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

There should be a formal implementation regime which would ensure full compliance with the instrument, and a comprehensive strengthening of the Convention, especially in light of what was seen in other development fora. All these themes were closely interlinked. There had been great progress in bio-sciences, and the spread of this knowledge would be of benefit to all humanity. However, it also increased the threat against people. This situation led to the urgent need to assert strict control over these areas of work in order to prevent any development of biological weapons. The

adoption of codes of conduct and of ethics were the necessary tools which should be promoted. In this work, States could require assistance, and they should receive it.

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