

**Regional Seminar and Workshop on National Implementation of the  
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)**

*Astana, Kazakhstan  
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**Opening Remarks by Amb. Marius Grinius  
Chair of the 2009 meetings of the BTWC**

**“Biological Risks and Threats”**

Good morning everyone. It is a pleasure to be here today and to have the opportunity to welcome you to this Workshop on the National Implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. It is a special honour for me to stand before you wearing two (metaphorical) hats – one as Chairman of the 2009 inter-sessional process for the BTWC, the other as Canada’s Ambassador for Disarmament. I wish to assure you that I appreciate and understand well that these two hats bestow upon their wearers very different responsibilities and expectations. In this particular case, however, with both hats resting on the same head, I trust that you will indulge me as I speak in both my national and multilateral capacities. (The only alternative would have been for me to deliver two speeches here, so I am confident that you will support my approach!)

Let me begin by expressing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan the gratitude of both the Government of Canada and the BTWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) for collaborating with us to implement this important workshop. I would also take this opportunity to recognize and thank the organizers of this event – the International Science and Technology Center and the Technology Management Center (TMC). We value and appreciate the commitment and leadership that each of these centers has shown in organizing this workshop -- and we are pleased and proud to have supported this initiative.

I also wish to thank the experts from the Depository states to the BTWC -- Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – as well as the BTWC ISU, who travelled far to contribute their considerable expertise and experience to this week’s workshop. Acknowledgement and thanks are also due to the many participants who are here from Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Your participation will be key to the success of this important event.

And success is critical, for we have assembled here together to tackle an issue of overwhelming importance and complexity – national implementation of the multilateral Convention that aims to forever rid the world of the scourge of biological weapons. For more than 30 years, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has prohibited an entire category of arms, has renounced them as “repugnant to the conscience of mankind,” and has stood as an essential pillar of international peace and security.

Biological weapons have in the past been a real threat. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century states around the world ran offensive weapons programs that resulted in many different agents (bacteria, viruses and fungi) being deployed in various weapon systems (including bombs, rockets, sprayers and sabotage devices) to target

humans, animals and plants. Although these programs differed in size, scope and efficiency, they did wield weapons that could have been used. Luckily, there are very few instances, to date, of the use of such weapons. Some states, however, continued to develop these weapons long after the majority of the world gave them up.

The threat posed by the hostile use of biology is not static. It has changed over time. There are at least four trends that are influencing the nature of this threat and which we will need to take into account as we work on countering it: firstly, biological weapons are no longer solely the preserve of states. There has been considerable concern about the possibility of non-state groups acquiring and using these weapons.

Secondly, the technology involved is almost entirely dual-use. New techniques for genetic manipulation and the synthetic production of biological products are resulting in significant advancements in the fields of both medicine and pharmacology. However, like many other technologies, these developments can have a potential “dual-use”. It is therefore the responsibility of government and the international community to establish a workable balance between the potential risks and the benefits of these new technologies.

Thirdly, the science and technology involved has continued to advance. Relevant developments include: artificial synthesis of pathogens or agents, opportunities to increase agent virulence, induced antibiotic resistance, random shuffling of genetic material, create “stealth” viral vectors, hyper-mutative pathogen, auto-immune diseases, use of bio-regulators, binary BW agents and long-term agents. Technologies for producing agents/toxins are also becoming cheaper and easier and can produce hardier, longer lasting pathogens. They are safer to use, require smaller facilities, cost significantly less, and can create higher yields in shorter time-frame.

Fourthly, globalization is dispersing bio-tech know-how around the world, including to states and non-state actors who may not have signed on to international non-proliferation norms or have a track record of non-compliance. A lot of economic activity in the bio-tech industry is resulting in ever more rapid development of new technologies. Scientific information is more widely available with the preponderance of dual-use technologies, and genetic sequences for highly virulent pathogens are now freely available on the internet.

Just as the threats have changed, so has the BTWC evolved to keep pace. To address such risks and threats, in which the potential impacts are so great, requires a coordinated, multifaceted approach, that harnesses all of the many and diverse resources at our disposal. Bringing together such a wide variety of stakeholders and communities has been one important role played by the BTWC's intersessional processes.

Of course the BTWC is not perfect, and for much of the past two decades attention has been focused on ways and means to better monitor and ensure compliance with the Convention's obligations. And while efforts should and will continue to bolster the BTWC's effectiveness by adding new measures and mechanisms, we must also work to ensure that all States Parties are fully

accountable to one another in how they implement the existing provisions of the Convention. This objective is at the heart of the workshop that has brought us together in Astana. The recognition that we can all do more -- do better -- in fulfilling our national obligations under the BTWC; the understanding that accession to the BTWC is not the end of a nation's BTWC responsibilities, but rather the beginning; and that active participation in all aspects of the BTWC process by each and every State party is essential for national and international security.

For those states that have recently joined the BTWC fold, it doubtless seems a daunting task to implement fully all of its various provisions. But when one looks more carefully at what the BTWC requires of States party, it becomes clear that the burden is not unduly onerous and that the benefits are well worth the effort. How much is it worth to prevent a biological attack from happening in, or originating from, our countries? What would be the social, political, economic and human costs if a biological weapon was unleashed by a state or terrorist group within our borders? While it is impossible to answer this question with precision, the example of both contemporary naturally-occurring disease outbreaks (such as pandemic H1N1 and SARS) and the terrorist use of anthrax in the United States in 2001 makes clear that the ounce of prevention that is national implementation of the BTWC is far, far cheaper and less painful than response to a biological incident.

In this regard, it is our hope that this workshop will help to spark enhanced national implementation of the BTWC across Central Asia and the Caucasus. For indeed, more needs to be done in this critically important part of the world to animate and enhance existing commitments. The development and implementation of national legislation and effective export controls, the annual completion of confidence building measures (CBMs) and the active participation of each and every State Party in the Convention's inter-sessional and quinquennial Review is essential for the Convention to achieve its purpose -- preventing the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling and retention of biological weapons.

So, what is to be done? The answer, of course, will be different for each country. But the good news is, you are not alone. As demonstrated by the participation of experts from outside this region, there are a number of states and organizations willing to assist countries from Central Asia and the Caucasus to enhance their implementation of the BTWC. This support is not new. It was demonstrated by Canadian, UK and US sponsorship of participation of experts from Central Asia and the Caucasus at last month's BTWC meeting of experts in Geneva. It is evidenced by the ongoing collaboration between VERTIC and states of this region to develop national legislation in accordance with Article IV of the BTWC.

As for Canada, this workshop is part of the broad partnership between Canada and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus in the area of biological non-proliferation. As many of you know, Canada's Global Partnership Program is working with most of the countries assembled here today to enhance our shared objective of preventing terrorists, or those that harbour them, from acquiring or developing biological weapons and related materials, equipment and technology. By example, we supported the establishment of a new Biosafety Association for Central Asia and the Caucasus, which held its first annual meeting in Almaty in May of this year. Also in Almaty, we are working closely with Kazakh colleagues to establish a

Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity Training Center. And in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, which I had the pleasure to visit earlier this year, Canada is building a new human & animal health facility, which will reduce the threat posed by theft, sabotage accidental release and/or terrorist acquisition of dangerous pathogens in the Kyrgyz Republic. We are confident that this new facility will pay important dividends across the entire region.

While most of Canada's GPP efforts to date have been focused on biosafety and biosecurity in the laboratory environment, supporting strengthened national implementation of multilateral non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament (NACD) obligations in the biological area is an integral component of Canada's comprehensive, collaborative biological non-proliferation program with partner countries. Biosafety and biosecurity measures can and must not stop at the walls of biological laboratories – they must extend to the very borders of our countries, and beyond. Indeed, it is a fundamental truth that biosafety and biosecurity initiatives can only achieve their full potential where proper attention has been paid to recognising, establishing and implementing appropriate and robust non-proliferation policies and practices. This is particularly true as Global Partnership collaboration is spawning new opportunities for international cooperation in the biological sciences – opportunities, which I hasten to add, provide tangible evidence that Canada is fulfilling its obligations under Article X of the BTWC to facilitate the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the use of biological agents and toxins for peaceful purposes.

Through our membership in the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) and the Science and Technology Center Ukraine (STCU), Canada is funding many important biological science projects in partner countries from this region that both further our non-proliferation objectives and support regional and international efforts to combat the spread of disease. And this point I wish to underscore. Notwithstanding the cause of disease outbreak – be it a deliberate, repugnant, act of war or terror, or the age-old route of natural infection – the results could be the same. Disease, after all, is disease, no matter why or how it strikes, or where it comes from. As such, despite their different origins, biological non-proliferation and the fight against naturally-occurring diseases share a common end.

This approach is becoming a reality. The theme of the 2009 BTWC intersessional process is international cooperation and capacity building in disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment. It provides a tangible bridge between natural and deliberate disease. The BTWC strongly encourages countries to assist each other in building domestic and international disease surveillance and containment capacity, and the Meeting of Experts in August 2009 allowed countries to liaise, and possibly combine their expertise in new capacity building projects.

As the assembly here today makes clear, working together -- in ways that engage and include various governments, communities and people -- is the only way to meet the diverse challenges at hand. Common purpose, common resolve, resolute commitment to action and real partnership are required.

We look forward to working with you in that spirit.