

**Statement to the First Committee by Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan),
President of the Sixth Review Conference and Chairman of the 2007 meetings of
the Biological Weapons Convention, at the First Committee**

New York; 22 October 2007

Mr. Chairperson

The BWC is a simple instrument, only a few pages long. Its prohibitions are clear, succinct, categorical and definitive, but it is an instrument of principle rather than procedure. It contains no provision for monitoring or verification of compliance, no provision for an implementing organization, no details of how alleged breaches should be investigated, no organized means of helping States Parties meet their obligations. Yet the treaty remains an effective barrier against the development of biological weapons.

From 2001 onwards, the future of the BWC as a resilient regime was threatened by the bitterness and rancour of the dispute over a protocol to strengthen the BWC. After many years of work, the effort collapsed in disagreement and recrimination in 2001. Following the dramatic suspension of the Fifth Review Conference in 2001, it seemed possible that multilateral efforts against biological weapons might come to a permanent halt. Fortunately, that did not happen.

First came a period of damage control and resuscitation. At the resumed session of the Fifth Review Conference in 2002, States Parties succeeded in putting their differences to one side in order to establish a work programme for 2003 to 2005, at which they would work on several specific topics related to better implementation of the Convention. There would be no attempt to negotiate or agree on binding measures, or even recommendations. Expectations were correspondingly low. And yet, to the surprise of many, the process was a success.

The preparation for the Sixth Review Conference in 2006, over which it was my honour to preside, started in an atmosphere of mistrust, bitterness and rancour. Bit by bit, we were able change this atmosphere into one of empathy and engagement. Uncertainty hung over the outcome of the Review Conference till the last day. My goal as President of the Conference was to enable states parties to transcend the divisions of the past, and settle the BWC on its new course. The constructive, practical and realistic manner, in which all States Parties responded to this challenge, while maintaining their long-standing goals and positions of principle, ultimately ensured the success of the Conference. I would like to thank sincerely all those who participated and contributed to the result, including many of my colleagues attending the First Committee session here today.

The Conference conducted a full article by article review and agreed on a Final Declaration embodying a common vision for the Convention and its implementation, ending a ten-year gap and resolving many of the issues that had divided States Parties. This in itself was a fundamental step forward that will open the way for improved collective action against the threat of biological weapons. The Conference also agreed on many practical measures, including:

- A detailed new intersessional work programme to help ensure effective implementation of the Convention until the Seventh Review Conference in 2011;
- Specific measures to obtain universal adherence to the Convention;
- An update of the mechanism for the confidence-building measures, and foreshadowing a more thorough review in 2011;
- Requiring States Parties to nominate a national point of contact to better coordinate various aspects of national implementation and universalisation;
- Various measures to improve national implementation, including of Article X of the Convention dealing with the peaceful uses of biological science and technology.
- Establishment of an Implementation Support Unit for the Convention, addressing a long-standing need for institutional support for the efforts of States Parties in implementing both the Convention itself and the decisions of the review conferences. The Implementation Support Unit is now operational and is busy preparing for the 2007 Meeting of States Parties, which will be held in Geneva from 10 to 14 December.

Implementation of the other decisions of the Review Conference is also well under way. The decision to undertake coordinated action to encourage non-members to join the Convention is already bearing fruit, with four states – Gabon, Kazakhstan, Montenegro and Trinidad and Tobago -having joined since the Conference concluded. The new system for secure electronic distribution of the confidence-building measures is already operational, and the measures submitted so far in 2007 are now available on this system. Many States Parties have already nominated their national contact points, and are in regular contact with the Implementation Support Unit.

The Meeting of Experts, which was held from 20 to 24 August, marked the formal commencement of the new intersessional work programme. The meeting considered ways and means to enhance national implementation, and regional and sub-regional cooperation on implementation. National experts from 93 States Parties participated, along with international organisations such as Interpol and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and regional bodies such as the African Union and the League of Arab States. The result is that experts from across different departments and agencies had the opportunity to share information and experiences. The meeting developed synergies both within and across delegations. Experts, I

believe, went back to their capitals to engage with their governments with a broader perspective, new ideas, and greater confidence. Overtime, this will help move the BWC higher on national agendas, and will give a renewed impetus to national implementation and regional cooperation activities in many States Parties. This is very much the role these meetings of experts play.

The output of the Meeting of Expert will feed into the Meeting of States Parties which will be held later in the year. We are hoping that the common understandings on national implementation and regional and sub-regional activities, that were evident in our meeting earlier in the year, will bear fruit and we will see effective action to provide real-world measures to tackle the threat posed by biological weapons.

It is my endeavour to create a new synergy among key international organisations and actors dealing with the BWC directly or indirectly. I have invited Directors-General of the WHO, OPCW, and Interpol to share their perspectives with the states parties of the BWC and give them a sense of the important work their organisations are doing in the areas of disease surveillance, fighting chemical weapons, and opposing the threat of bio-terrorism. It is my hope that we will be in a position to engage even more effectively with relevant organisations at this meeting. Again, working on synergies, with the consent of the states parties I am trying to involve representative of NGOs and industry more closely with the work of the BWC. We will not work in silos, but in shared open spaces, with each actor playing its unique but supportive role to fight the common threat of biological weapons.

Next year, our work will turn to the important topics of biosafety and biosecurity, as well as education and awareness-raising. Dealing with the safety and security of biological resources, as well as ensuring that all those involved in relevant activities are aware of the international, regional and national measures which regulate their activities and the principles that underpin them, will go a long way towards ensuring that we continue to enjoy the benefits of biotechnology while being shielded from its dangers. Addressing these issues will necessitate continued engagement with the scientific, medical, commercial and educational communities. We will have to develop a coordinated approach to the prevention of the misuse of biological science and technology.

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to report that the BWC is in good shape and ready to confront the challenges it faces. The outcome of the Sixth Review Conference has given us a solid foundation for our efforts. We can take some satisfaction from this result, especially in light of the difficulties and divisions we have experienced in the past. But much remains to be done: the success of the Conference is a means to an end, not an end in itself. All States Parties need to continue to work hard to turn words into action, to overcome their remaining differences, and to convert their shared vision into reality. I am confident that today the Biological Weapons Convention is poised to make a

genuine and significant contribution to reducing the risks of biological weapons being developed or used by any actor, anywhere in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.