

**Biosafety and Biosecurity International Conference 2007**  
**Abu Dhabi, 12-14 November 2007**

Session 1: Framing the Challenge: The Full Spectrum of Biological Risks

**Opening comments of Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan), President of the Sixth  
Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, and Chairman of the  
2007 Meeting of States Parties**

Mr. Terence Taylor,  
Dr. Jaber Al Jaber,  
Mr. Majid Al Mansouri,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this conference and moderate this session. I want to thank H.H. Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates, and the UAE Government for supporting this conference, which is most timely.

I am particularly thankful to Mr. Terence Taylor, President and Director of the International Council for the Life Sciences, for giving me this opportunity to attend this important conference. His strong commitment and tenacity of purpose, I am confident, will open new avenues for dialogue between governments, industry and scientists in the areas of biotechnology and the life sciences.

I am very pleased to be here with Mr. Majid Al Mansouri and so many distinguished policy makers and experts for what promises to be a very interesting and stimulating discussion on a crucial topic.

At the outset, I want to endorse the fundamental objective of this conference: to build a global network between governments, international organisations, academic and research institutions, and the private sector to deal with the developments in the field of the life sciences.

Our theme for this morning is the "full spectrum of biological risks", which runs from naturally occurring diseases at one end, through unintended consequences, accidents, lack of awareness and negligence, to deliberate misuse, at the other.

By looking at the spectrum it is evident that it is futile to attempt to tackle these risks individually, as isolated threats. It is imperative that we meet this challenge collectively. We need to coordinate and harmonise our efforts to ensure that we make the most efficient use of limited resources, avoid duplication and redundancy, and manage all risks effectively. No longer can we leave medical authorities to deal with disease outbreaks alone, independent of regulatory authorities dealing with laboratory standards and licensing, police and security agencies trying to prevent terrorism, or multilateral negotiators attempting to strengthen international norms and barriers against the

development, transfer and use of biological weapons.

The shift to this way of thinking has been particularly evident in my own field of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). The BWC is an international treaty that outlaws the development, production, transfer and use of biological and toxin weapons. Negotiated over 35 years ago, at the height of the Cold War, it is a response to the deliberate use of biology as a weapon. Along with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the later Chemical Weapons Convention, the BWC forms one of the three pillars of the international community's response to weapons of mass destruction. The BWC was, and is, a *security instrument*. Over much of its history, its members have argued about the need to add verification machinery to the treaty -- in the form of inspections, monitoring and so on -- but these efforts ultimately foundered in 2001 in the face of intractable political and technological challenges. But this was not to be a dead end.

Members of the BWC realised that because of the pervasiveness of biotechnology and rapidity of change and development in the biosciences, governments alone could not confront the threat of biological weapons in the traditional arms control sense. No government or international organisation could hope to monitor the tens of thousands of small biotechnology facilities spreading around the world. The number of facilities and the capability of the technology are ever increasing, while the cost and size of the equipment drops steadily.

The member states of the BWC developed a new approach to incorporate the efforts not only of the defence and security sector, but also of the public health, agriculture, law enforcement, and education sectors, as well as the international scientific community and commercial industry. If the potential problem lies in many hands, ran the logic, so must the solution. From 2003-2005, BWC members held a series of meetings looking at ways both to find synergies and improve coordination among different sectors and actors nationally, and to boost regional cooperation. The endeavour succeeded.

Yet the regime was not fully repaired. The preparations for the 2006 BWC Review Conference started in an atmosphere of mistrust and rancour. By the end of the Review Conference, however, States Parties overcame their differences, conducted a full article by article review, and opened the way for improved collective action against the threat of biological weapons. The Conference 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;

*(The themes for the intersessional meetings are: national implementation; regional and subregional cooperation; biosecurity and biosafety; oversight, education, awareness raising, codes of conduct; assistance and capacity enhancement; and assistance and coordination in case of alleged use of biological weapons.)*

- A plan of action to obtain universal adherence to the Convention;

- Nomination of national points of contact for the BWC for national implementation and universalisation;
- Ways 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.

One major area of focus for the BWC is biosecurity and biosafety. Investments in biosafety and biosecurity will provide benefits right across the spectrum we are considering, from naturally occurring disease, to accidents and negligence, to deliberate use. Bringing in the different perspectives and expertise of different sectors and actors results in a much broader, deeper and more comprehensive approach to the issues. Biosecurity, for example, might once have been thought of as a simple extension of biosafety: mainly physical security measures, or what one might crudely describe as "biosafety with locks on the door". Now it is a multidimensional discipline. Physical security is still important of course, but it is just one link in a complex chain that includes training and licensing, information management, awareness-raising, codes of conduct, disease surveillance, protocols for cooperation and information sharing between health and law enforcement agencies, export controls, transport regulation, and emergency preparedness and response, among others.

Nor is it any longer a matter of governments laying down regulations and everyone else following them -- perhaps with varying degrees of reluctance and resentment. Increasingly, scientific, professional and industry associations, as well as individual private enterprises, are realising they can make their own direct and valuable contributions to the global biosecurity effort. There are tremendous advantages in this, and I believe we should do everything possible to encourage the trend.

One key advantage is that the traditional tension between regulation and restriction in the interests of security, on the one hand, and the free development of science, technology and commerce on the other, is gradually being replaced by recognition of synergies and opportunities.

Next year, in the context of the BWC our work will turn 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.

At the BWC, it will be our endeavour to create a new synergy among key international organisations and actors dealing directly or indirectly with the threat of misuse of biology for hostile purposes. In my capacity as the Chairman on the 2007 BWC meetings, I have invited the Directors-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the Secretary General of Interpol to speak to the BWC states parties meeting in December 2007 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 dealing with the threat of bio-terrorism. 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.

Let me conclude my introductory comments by turning to this region, the Middle East. Here, as in other regions, we are seeing rapid advancements in biotechnology which have tremendous potential benefits for regional development. There is a great deal of investment, in infrastructure, in technology, in education and training, in health, veterinary and agricultural systems. Trade is increasing, and the exchange of personnel, equipment, technology and know-how is expanding rapidly. Regional capabilities in biosafety and biosecurity will need to grow to keep pace with this. Such growth will require coordinated efforts, within and across national systems, incorporating the capacities and contributions of the different sectors. Conferences such as this one will play an important role in developing such efforts.

I have talked of the roles of different agencies, of scientific and professional associations, and of the private sector, but we must also remember the broader role of governments. The BWC, which is the fundamental norm underpinning all our efforts to prevent the deliberate use of disease, does not yet enjoy universal membership. In the Gulf, the Middle East and Africa, we need to work harder to accelerate the pace of universalisation. Governments in the region do recognise the benefits of joining the BWC, as an important step towards dealing effectively with the full spectrum of biological risks. All we need is better coordination to achieve this objective. I hope that our host country, the United Arab Emirates, will soon be able to ratify the treaty.

As for the BWC, our important work will continue with renewed vigour, following the successful outcome of the Sixth Review Conference. As I mentioned earlier, next year, the member states will focus explicitly on biosafety and biosecurity, and I encourage all of you here to take the opportunity to get involved in and contribute to that process. We need the voices of scientists, of industry, of educators, regulators, health workers, veterinarians, security officials, and many others. And we need the voice of the Middle East: your perspectives, your contributions, your solutions.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to a lively discussion this morning.

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