

# **STRENGTHENING A GLOBAL BIOSECURITY/ BIOSAFETY FRAMEWORK AND COPING WITH THE BIOTECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION**

*Council Room, Municipality of Como, Como, Italy, 25- 26October 2007*

Statement by Ambassador Masood Khan of Pakistan  
President of the Sixth Review Conference of the BWC &  
Chairman of the BWC meetings in 2007.

Thank you for inviting me to make a keynote address to this meeting. I am very pleased to be here and to have an opportunity to talk to you about the international efforts to strengthen our collective defences against the use of biology for harm, while we take advantage of the many opportunities offered for progress. The discussions we will have during this meeting will, I am sure, make a significant contribution to such efforts. From the perspective of my current position with the Biological Weapons Convention (or BWC), this event is timely, not only because it offers an opportunity to look back on the progress made over the last couple of years, but because it occurs at a time when we are beginning to turn our attention to next year's programme. This meeting deals with those issues which will be thrust under the full glare of the international spotlight in 2008. If we are to continue to enjoy the progress made over recent years, then we must ensure we are well prepared for next year. The issues on the table must have been thoroughly examined in advance of our meetings and our thinking must be well developed. Events such as this will play an important role in ensuring future successes for the BWC.

Many of us gathered here for this meeting are aware of the interesting history of the BWC. The Convention entered into force a little over thirty years ago. It 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. Many considered this a serious shortcoming. Now, however, it may prove to be something of an asset. Let me explain why.

As the title of this meeting suggests, the international community is confronted by a unique challenge in dealing with the threat posed by the potential malign use of biology and the life sciences. Relevant resources are more numerous and more widely distributed than their equivalents in other disarmament fields; distinctions between malign and benign uses more blurred; and, perhaps, the cost of an ineffective response, too high for any of

us to pay. To be able to overcome such a challenge, distinct and innovative solutions are necessary. The hurdles to be overcome are considerable. They will demand our collective effort. We must forge new partnerships, work together more effectively and maximise the impact of our combined resources. To do this we need flexibility. The room for manoeuvre provided by principle-driven nature of the BWC lends itself to this task, and the decisions of the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 have put the BWC in a good position to act as the focus of the various different tasks we must undertake. The BWC, I am sure, will play an ever more important role in our collective efforts to maximise the benefits offered by biotechnology while minimising its potential for malign use.

This is a distinct and welcome change from the recent troubled history of the Convention. In the 1990s, negotiations were begun on a protocol to strengthen and verify the BWC. This protocol would have added to the BWC the verification elements present in other regimes. After many years of work, this effort collapsed in disagreement and recrimination in 2001. When the Fifth Review Conference later that year foundered on sharp differences, it seemed possible that multilateral efforts against biological weapons could come to a complete halt. Yet this did not happen. Thanks to the resourcefulness and determination of the States Parties, the BWC embarked on a new course.

First came a period of reflection 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, agree on binding measures, or to work towards the procedural elements of the sidelined Protocol. Expectations were correspondingly low. And yet, to the surprise of many, the process was a success. Experts from all around the world gathered to share experiences and ideas on how to deal with the threat posed by biological weapons. Officials from health, science and agriculture ministries made connections with their counterparts in defence, justice, foreign affairs and security agencies.

Just as importantly, these meetings provided an opportunity for the world's scientific community and medical professionals to become directly engaged in developing a response to a threat that, in a sense, had become too widespread and all-pervasive for governments to tackle alone. The extraordinary advances achieved in biosciences meant that biological weapons were - in theory - within reach of the smallest laboratory and most modest budget. No government or international organization could hope to monitor effectively the tens of thousands of small biotechnology facilities in operation worldwide. Clearly, this was a problem that needed a collective, multifaceted and multidimensional approach. The work programme of 2003 to 2005 showed

that such an approach could work, and started to develop the necessary network of collaboration and coordination: a network that must weave international, regional and domestic strands into a flexible and resilient fabric of oversight and prevention.

The Sixth Review Conference was therefore an opportunity for States Parties to consolidate and formalise the new approach they had collectively developed. Our goal was to transcend the divisions of the past, and settle the BWC on its new course. But there were many obstacles to be overcome. Political differences and resentments from the disappointments of 2001 lingered on, and there was an atmosphere of mistrust and pessimism among States Parties. This was not helped by the high-profile failures in other multilateral disarmament endeavours, such as the NPT and small arms conferences. Nonetheless, the BWC States Parties, recognising the importance of their shared responsibility, approached the task in good faith and with energy and determination. As President, I was able to persuade delegations to focus on areas where consensus was possible, and to put the intractable issues to the side. The constructive, practical and realistic manner in which all States Parties approached their preparations for the Conference, while maintaining their long-standing goals and positions of principle, demonstrated their recognition of the fundamental importance of the BWC, and provided a much-needed proof of the great potential of multilateral diplomacy. The Conference built on the good results of the intersessional process and the confidence it had engendered among States Parties. It was a difficult Conference, but ultimately a successful one.

The outcome of the Review Conference is best characterised not as a diplomatic triumph that makes the world safer from biological weapons in one giant leap, but rather as a basis for coordinated action that has the potential to reduce the threat of development, acquisition or use of BW in a series of small steps. In other words, the success of the Conference is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The Review Conference 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 so divided States Parties. 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; and perhaps most importantly
- Establishing an Implementation Support Unit for the Convention, addressing a long-standing need for institutional support for the efforts of States Parties in implementing the Convention itself and the decisions of the review conferences.

Those are the main decisions - but what matters are the actions. Let's look at what has actually been done since the conclusion of the Review Conference. First, the Implementation Support Unit is now operational, and was officially launched on 20 August, the opening day of the 2007 Meeting of Experts. The three staff of the ISU are busy working to fulfil the terms of its mandate. The new system for secure electronic distribution of the confidence-building measures is already operational, and indeed a record number of States Parties have participated in the CBMs this year. The ISU is working with several States Parties which have approached it for assistance, whether on national implementation, or to help develop their own projects for regional cooperation or universalisation efforts.

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 - Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Trinidad and Tobago and Gabon - having joined since the Conference concluded. This has increased the number of States Parties from 155 to 159. 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 will now go back to their capitals and engage with their governments with a broader perspective, new ideas, and greater confidence. 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 results of the Meeting of Experts will form the basis for the work of the Meeting of States Parties (10-14 December 2007), which will consider options for developing common understandings and effective action on the two topics. I am currently discussing with delegations how we can make this meeting more effective.

Next year, our work will turn to the important topics of biosafety and biosecurity, as well as, education and awareness-raising. Both issues lie at the heart of the event for which we are all gathered here today. 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, interlinked approach to the prevention of the misuse of biological science and technology. Events, such as the one today, will continue to play an important role in reinforcing interactions, strengthening linkages and forging new relationships – all of which lie at the heart of the new approach adopted by the BWC.

As the 2007 – 2010 intersessional process moves forward, I would like to see even closer involvement of NGOs, the scientific community, academics, commercial industry and civil society. Indeed, I think that this concept of collective action on different levels, of a network of shared tasks and responsibilities, is the key to building and maintaining a strong regime to prevent the development, acquisition or use of biological weapons. In such a vision, the BWC will be key, both as a clear and fundamental legal norm, and as a forum for coordination of the various activities.

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.

The BWC today 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.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to the discussions to come.

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