

**STATEMENT BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SIXTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION : 20 NOVEMBER 2006**

Mr President,

On behalf of the South African delegation I would like to extend our congratulations to you on your appointment to preside over this Review Conference. During the meeting of the Preparatory Committee for this Review Conference, you demonstrated that you possess the necessary skills and the know-how to guide States Parties to this Convention to a successful conclusion. We are convinced that you will do the same during this important meeting. My delegation would like to also extend its congratulations to the other office bearers on their appointment. I assure you of my delegation's co-operation with both yourself and with other delegations to ensure that our work is substantive and meaningful and that we are able to conclude successfully.

The Sixth Review Conference provides us as States Parties with the first opportunity to do a thorough article-by-article review of the Convention since it was done at the Fourth Review Conference in 1996. This is very significant, especially in the light of developments that took place in the international arena during the last 10 years. This Review Conference also provides us with an opportunity to strengthen this important part of the international disarmament and non-proliferation infrastructure.

Mr. President,

My delegation can categorically state that the threat of disease being used as a weapon remains an issue of serious concern to South Africa, therefore South Africa remains committed to the strengthening of this Convention, as was demonstrated in the past, to ensure that our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons is achieved. We also continue to believe that this is not a commitment or a goal that can only be undertaken by individual States or groups of States acting on their own. If our opposition to biological weapons is to be sustained in the long term, it is 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. South Africa continues to see the strengthening of the implementation of the BWC as a core element of the international security architecture. We believe that this objective remains possible and that legitimate concerns can be addressed in a satisfactory manner. We therefore see the strengthening of the Convention as the main objective of this Review Conference.

It is the view of South Africa that the intersessional programme that we had agreed upon at the Fifth Review Conference has proven to be more successful than most of us had anticipated in 2001. The intersessional programme maintained some momentum in the Convention and kept us focussed on issues related to the Convention and more specifically on issues related to the national implementation of the Convention.

Mr President,

An important part of our work here in the coming three weeks will be to consider the work done intersessionally since the last Review Conference, as part of the article-by-article review of the Convention. Another very important aspect of our work here will be to consider a programme for the intersessional period following this Review Conference and to agree to a date for a Seventh Review Conference of the Convention.

In this regard, South Africa has provided the Secretariat with a Working Paper on the New Intersessional Process for inclusion in background documentation that has been prepared for this Conference. The aim of this paper is to provide suggestions and to promote discussion on an intersessional process that will be more streamlined, but will contribute to the strengthening of the Convention.

In the same way, South Africa has also prepared a Working Paper on Confidence Building Measures. The paper on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) asks a variety of questions regarding the effectivity of the current CBM format and system and suggests that CBM's could be the topic of one of the meetings of Experts during the intersessional period.

South Africa also considers the investigation of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons an important element of a strengthened Convention. In this regard the need for an effective investigating mechanism available to the United Nations Security Council and the Secretary General of the United Nations is essential. South Africa therefore welcomes the initiative taken by the General Assembly to strengthen the existing investigating mechanism as part of the resolution on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. We urge the Secretary General to address this issue urgently.

Mr. President,

South Africa is equally committed to the need to combat disease and its debilitating impact on the socio-economic development of countries around the world, and especially in Africa. The Convention does not only provide a means to strengthen our security. It also contains an important technical co-operation and assistance provision that enhances the international community's fight against the debilitating impact of disease on our peoples and on socio-economic development. As an African and developing country, South Africa attaches great importance to this provision of the Convention and believes that it should be utilised more effectively in the combat of infectious disease in general. Disease knows no boundaries -- especially in the modern world, with its advanced systems of communication and travel -- and all the countries of the world should take hands to win this fight against infectious disease.

A very important element of our discussions during this Review Conference will be the advances in the biosciences during the last 10 years and their relevance to the Convention. During these discussions it is important that we also take into consideration the areas in which the biosciences are still lacking, in particular in terms of the fight against infectious disease.

The threat that biological weapons, however, hold for the entire international community has, however, been more than amply demonstrated in the past. The necessity at this Review Conference is for all States Parties to approach our work in a constructive way and to co-operate so as to accomplish our common goal, and to satisfy the aspiration of the international community as a whole for the States Parties of the BWC to do all in their power to prevent the use of disease as weapons of war and terror.

Mr President, I thank you.