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Statement by the Minister of State for Foreign  
and Commonwealth Affairs, the Rt Hon David Hedley Ennals MP  
at the ceremony marking the entry into force of the  
Biological Weapons Convention in London on  
Wednesday 26 March 1975

Today three ceremonies are taking place in parallel in London, Moscow and Washington to mark the entry into force of the biological weapons convention of 1972.

I am very glad to be welcoming you here for our London ceremony. As the Minister now responsible for arms control and disarmament matters, I have a very direct interest in the positive international achievement which lies behind today's ceremonies.

But it also gives me personal satisfaction to be here today because I have had a long personal interest in the questions of disarmament and what the world community can do to make the world a safer place.

I am particularly glad to be welcoming the presence amongst us today of the ambassador of Afghanistan who has, earlier this morning, deposited his own government's instrument of ratification of this important convention.

The interest of the three depository governments in bringing this convention into force was expressed by President Ford on 22 January when signing the US instrument of ratification of the convention and by the British Prime Minister and General Secretary Brezhnev in their joint statement of 17 February. Our three governments as Depository Powers for the Convention have a particular sense of satisfaction in having today joined those who have already ratified the Convention, thus bringing it into force.

As far as we in Britain are concerned, the history of this Convention - which spans three British administrations - illustrates both the consistent British commitment to the search for the limitation and reduction of armaments and the role in these efforts

of Labour administrations. It was in 1968 that the United Kingdom tabled a working paper, in what was then the 18 Nation Disarmament Conference in Geneva, calling for the early conclusion of a new convention to prohibit biological methods of warfare.

The Geneva Protocol of 1925 had already prohibited the use of biological weapons, as well as of gases, in war. The British proposal in 1968 was designed to supplement this prohibition in two ways: by banning the production and possession as well as the use of biological agents, and by banning them in all circumstances, not only in war.

In July 1969, the United Kingdom duly tabled in Geneva a draft convention for the prohibition of biological methods of warfare. But the Biological Weapons Convention, opened for signature on 10 April 1972, is of course the product of patient, multilateral negotiation in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva.

The Biological Weapons Convention is significant as the first measure, reached since the Second World War, involving the destruction of existing weapons. Biological warfare was potentially a most frightening method of armed conflict. From today over 40 states are parties to this Convention, and have both renounced this entire class of weapons and undertaken to prevent their future development, by appropriate national measures. All governments for whom this Treaty formally enters into force today should gain satisfaction from having taken a step which will reduce the possibility of biological weapons being used in some future conflict. We urge all states, especially those who have signed but not yet ratified the Convention, to become parties to it and thereby increase the sense of international security from these weapons.

But we must look on these achievements as a spur to further effort, as indeed the Biological Weapons Convention itself envisages in respect of chemical weapons. We cannot pretend that this task is easy but it is fitting that, on this occasion, I should renew the British Government's pledge to make its contribution to further international discussions in the hope that we can make progress. I know that our

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two fellow Depositaries share this objective as they have made clear on a number of occasions, notably in their joint announcement, made in Moscow on 3 July last, that they had "agreed to consider a joint initiative in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament with respect to the conclusion, as a first step, of an international convention dealing with the most dangerous, lethal means of chemical warfare".

We are now at half-way point in the period which the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed as the decade of disarmament. In this time three important treaties, which the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament has produced by painstaking and patient negotiation, have come into force: in 1970 the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons., in 1972 the Treaty on the De-Nuclearization of the Sea-Bed., and now, today, the Biological Weapons Convention. Nuclear proliferation, unlike biological warfare, is one of the greatest dangers facing the world today. It is vitally important that the Review Conference of this Treaty which starts on 5 May in Geneva should strengthen international determination to contain and reduce these dangers.