

**Event to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the
Biological Weapons Convention**

Statement by

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Ladies and gentlemen.

Dear colleagues and guests,

It gives me great pleasure to address you on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Forty years ago the BWC became the first international treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. In 1975, it was a major step forward for the whole mankind. Today, the Convention serves as an important element in the legal framework of WMD disarmament.

That being so, from the very start the BWC has been beset by numerous shortcomings seriously weakening the effectiveness of its regime. The most obvious one is the absence of measures for "strict and effective international control" over compliance in its provisions. In that respect the BWC differs radically from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention which both are equipped with functional systems for compliance monitoring. It is highly unlikely that any of the latter would have materialised without a verification mechanism but, surprisingly, for the BWC such absence is not only being tolerated but almost perpetuated. Against such background the threat posed by biological weapons remains real and even grows as science and technologies develop rather fast.

While the weakness of the original text of the BWC may be explained by the conditions prevailing at the moment on the international arena, further efforts to strengthen the Convention have also experienced serious difficulties. I would like to remind you that at the Second Review Conference in 1986 the Soviet Union proposed to develop a compliance control mechanism for the BWC and to launch international negotiations to that end. It became possible to begin that only in 1995. Those negotiations were preceded by the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (VEREX) which concluded by consensus in 1993 that verification measures would "contribute to strengthening the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention". Such measures were supposed to enhance confidence in compliance with and credibility of BWC.

In 1994, the BWC Special Conference agreed by consensus on the mandate to be pursued by a negotiating organ that it established, the Ad Hoc Group open to all States Parties. The objective of the Ad Hoc Group was to consider appropriate measures and

proposals on strengthening of the Convention to be included in a legally binding instrument (also known as "the Protocol") to be submitted for the consideration of States Parties. The negotiations in the Ad Hoc Group in 1995-2001 witnessed steady and significant progress. However, in 2001 when work on the Protocol was entering the final stage with a view to submitting a legally binding instrument for consideration of the Fifth Review Conference, the entire process was completely derailed because of the change in political climate. "A. failed revolution", as some call it, became a real setback for the efforts of all States Parties to make the BWC deliver on its promise to "exclude completely the possibility of biological agents being used as weapons". Such demoralising failure continues to accompany us to this day preventing serious multilateral endeavours in the BWC to reduce the threat posed by biological weapons.

In the absence of the BWC implementing agency that would take care of the Convention's well-being, Russia as a Depositary feels a special responsibility in that regard. We also remain concerned about biological weapons and the threat of their actual use. Therefore, last year we launched two BWC-related initiatives.

The first one was a survey of States Parties seeking their views on a resumption of negotiations based on the 1994 mandate on a legally binding instalment, if not all BWC States Parties were to become Parties to such an instrument. We received replies from 41 States Parties (one additional State Party made its position known to us in connection with our questionnaire). The majority of respondents gave an affirmative answer. The result of the survey was assessed by us as encouraging in a sense that the majority favoured resumption of negotiations. However, a very considerable number of States Parties from one regional group made it clear that since there was currently no consensus on verification in the BWC there would be no support from them to negotiate what they called "the Verification Protocol".

Taking into account the results of that survey we made an attempt to find a way out of the deadlock that we have been experiencing since 2001. The mandate of 1994 was examined with an open mind with a view to trying to salvage its elements that:

- a) create added value for the BWC States Parties in terms of the Convention's object and purpose;
- b) are feasible to pursue in this political situation.

Therefore, verification measures (inspections of dual-use facilities) were ruled out. A proposal was developed for a mechanism to investigate alleged use (to be activated by the affected State only) and specific provisions for assistance and protection in case of actual use taking place. Other elements such as promotion of international co-operation for peaceful purposes, national implementation, confidence building measures and permanent advisory organ for monitoring science and technology developments were added to the package. Such package to be shaped as a legally binding instrument would have established an Organisation for the Prohibition of Biological Weapons open to all BWC States Parties who find merit in their participation.

We made an initial presentation of the above ideas on 5 August 2014 on the margins of the BWC meeting of experts. The intent was to float a concept and see whether there was interest among States Parties for pursuing such an approach with a view to reaching specific understandings at the Eighth Review Conference in late 2016 and resuming negotiations thereafter. At this stage our assessment is that the proposed concept is feasible and may be developed further together with the interested States Parties. The main challenge is to overcome inertia and a perception of failure prevailing in the BWC environment since 2001, "Yes, we can" should be the motto in our collective endeavour to strengthen the Convention and reduce the threat of biological weapons.

Thank you for your attention.