PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE AND WORLD AFFAIRS

REMARKS BY AMB(ret.) SERGEY BATSANOV AT THE INFORMAL MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE 8th REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION.

Geneva, 8 August 2016

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset let me join all those, who have spoken before me at this informal meeting and have welcomed you, Mr. Chairman. Like my fellow NGO representatives, I am grateful to you and to all the Member States’ delegations for making it possible for us to share our views with you today.

However, in my case there is also something else that makes me feel grateful. Almost exactly 25 years ago I was leading my country’s delegation to the 3d BWC Review Conference. Then, in 1991, it was not an easy conference, but in the end it concluded with a set of positive forward-looking results, including the agreement on launching the process of VEREX. Those were optimistic times, of course.

My reference to the 3d Review Conference was not made just for nostalgic reasons; nor should it be understood as a suggestion to return to 2001 and resume the same work at the point, where it was stopped then. Rather, it was intended to signal the need to comprehensively reassess the current situation in order to chart a new road towards strengthening the BWC and ensuring its role for the future as an indispensable mechanism for achieving and maintaining the world free of WMD threats and of the WMDs themselves.

Many things have changed over the last 25 years. Thanks to scientific progress completely new ways of influencing life processes have emerged; the boundaries between various scientific areas are becoming porous or simply disappearing (convergence between chemistry and biology being just one example). The evolution of military doctrines and military science may increase potential attractiveness of less lethal tools for hostile purposes, thus making traditional perceptions of biological weapons and possible ways to verify them pretty much obsolete. Besides, we do not yet fully appreciate that new revolutionary technologies, designed and, in fact, used to cure people, may also be misused and abused with catastrophic consequences. Beyond that, new bio-risks are emerging due to global climate change and rapidly increasing migration and simply unprecedented global travel. Finally we have a risk of bio-terrorism.
There are many efforts underway to design a new global architecture to deal with these different threats; but unfortunately the BWC is often overlooked in the process. Furthermore, the responses to epidemic outbreaks and other bio-threats – both by governments and by the private sector – often are, or at least look heavily militarised in nature and military-run. This is not good for maintaining and strengthening the norm against biological warfare.

It’s naive to think that the BWC regime, even if considerably reinforced, would be able to address single-handedly all these new challenges. But this regime should be able to play its special role in a constellation of international agencies and partnerships, being the focal point and the point of reference for all efforts aimed against the use of biology as a method of war. Hence, it should have its operational, institutional and legal identities strengthened.

Therefore Pugwash hopes that the 8th Review Conference should be in a position to launch a qualitatively new phase of strengthening the BWC and increasing its operational capacity. Given a variety of proposals on the table, it may not be a simple task. Perhaps, a multi-optional approach could be chosen at the beginning, and approach, which could include options of developing a single protocol together with proposing specific agreed measures (such as creating a special scientific advisory committee) as they become ripe for adoption. If – as it looks likely, the current inter-sessional will not be dramatically altered, especially at the beginning, it should be empowered to engage in negotiations (perhaps through special working groups) and to adopt decisions without waiting for the 9th Review Conference. We urge all delegations to use the time remaining until the 8th Review Conference to actively consult on the whole range of its possible outcomes.

Before I conclude, Mr. Chairman, just a couple of words on a much narrow, still quite important issue – that of universality. A couple of weeks ago we all welcomed the accession of Angola to the BWC, which – as noted with satisfaction in many statements – made Angola the 175th State Party. Let me also join in congratulating Angola with this achievement. However, there are some discrepancies or, perhaps, inaccuracies in the statistics here. For example, the UNODA website gives the total number of States Parties as 173 – with Angola already included. I understand there is still a need to find some records regarding the succession by a couple or so of States Parties. May we kindly ask the Depositary Governments, together with the ISU to sort this out by the time of the Review Conference. Another discrepancy seems to exists with regard to the number of remaining non-parties. After accession of Angola, many statements mention the number 21. Yet, our calculations, based on the UNODA site, gave the number of 22 (also with Angola already a State Party). These are technical details, of course, but they illustrate the need of dealing with the issue of universality on a systematic day-by-day basis and with greater involvement of the ISU in this process.

In the end, Mr. Chairman, let me just wish you and all the delegations here success in laying the ground for a productive and forward-looking Review Conference in November.