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**Annual NATO Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation**  
**Ljubljana (9-10 May 2016)**

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to address you on the occasion of the Annual NATO Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, which will undoubtedly advance the debate on the current state of play as well as the future of multilateral non-proliferation regimes and initiatives. I give this speech today and share my assessment on challenges as well as future prospects faced by the Biological Weapons Convention as the President-Designate of the Eighth Review Conference of the Convention that will convene in Geneva, Switzerland from 7 to 25 November 2016.

The Biological Weapons Convention represents one of the fundamental pillars of multilateral disarmament. Considered a descendent of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, it was the first treaty to outlaw an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. More than 41 years have passed since the entry into force of the BWC in 1975 and a lot has been accomplished since then. Biological weapons have in essence disappeared from today's military inventories and policy makers have excluded them as viable battlefield options from their security concepts and military doctrines. Moreover, no one would seriously question the grave illegitimacy of biological weapons as a means of warfare today. A total of 114 States have joined the Convention, thereby making it a widely accepted norm against biological weapons. In short, these are all accomplishments that we can be proud of and which could not have been taken for granted in 1975 when this Treaty entered into force.

Both the OPCW with its successful chemical weapons destruction campaign in Syria and the IAEA with the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Islamic Republic of Iran have attracted worldwide attention in the recent past. I congratulate both organizations and their Member States on these very important accomplishments. The Biological Weapons Convention has received comparably much less attention in the last decade while efforts made by States Parties to strengthen the regime have gone largely unnoticed. One might be tempted to draw the conclusion that "no news is good news". However, such a simplistic judgement misrepresents recent assessments, which draw a more pessimistic picture regarding the potential threat posed by biological weapons.

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The threat from biological weapons is real and is not one that we should ignore or assign a lower priority to countering. It is no coincidence that at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos bio-weapons

together with autonomous weapons and cyberwar were identified as the three technologies that could transform warfare and impact both our individual and collective security.

Due to the effects of globalization and ever improving information and communication technology capabilities advances in biotechnology and life sciences are occurring at an unprecedented pace which is expected to only accelerate in the future. As a result of it, new means of production become available. As a recent report by the scientific journal *Nature* concluded, “science is now a global endeavor”. By and large such developments are to be welcomed and will contribute to vital global efforts such as the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the mitigation of the effects of climate change. More relevant to our work, these developments can also assist in the development of improved protection capabilities and medical treatment.

However, as those of us working in the security field are all too aware, such advances come with inherent risks. While bringing unparalleled benefits, we cannot ignore the fact that the inherent dual use nature of life sciences means that these developments could lower the barriers for their misuse in contravention of the BWC. Recently, an assessment by a coalition of national academies of science concluded that “technological barriers to acquiring and using a biological weapon have been significantly eroded since the Seventh [BWC] Review Conference” in 2011. Therefore, continuing attention needs to be given to these new trends in science and technology.

At the time the BWC was negotiated, related threats emanated solely from state-run level biological weapons programmes. However, as the Anthrax letter cases in the US or the recently discovered biological terrorism plot in Morocco have shown, possible use or threat of use of biological agents is no longer confined to states since non-state actors may also try to acquire biological material for malign purposes. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that considerable hurdles still exist, particularly for non-state actors to weaponize biological agents.

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This November, States Parties to the BWC will gather in Geneva for its Eighth Review Conference. This high level event will be decisive in shaping the mid-term perspective of the Convention. Fortunately, it was clear from the preparatory meeting in Geneva two weeks ago that attention is already focusing on this need, and many proposals have already been tabled.

However, it is important that we strive to maintain and further increase this momentum over the coming months. Like any international treaty, the BWC does not look after itself – it requires “tending”. This is not a cost-free exercise, but for many years the time and money invested in the BWC at the international level has been minimal in comparison with other treaties such as the CWC or CTBT, and when weighed against the growing challenges it faces. It is my impression however, that this attitude may be changing, and the extended preparatory process that we are conducting in advance of the Review Conference is an encouraging sign in this regard.

One important element of this ongoing work relates to the Convention being a treaty states *want* to join. A large majority of countries, 174 states, almost 90 percent of all states, have done so. However, this does not compare well for example with the CWC which has 192 States Parties. In order to make clear that the very notion of using disease as a weapon is illegitimate, it is important that all States join the Convention. Eight states have yet to ratify the Convention and another 14 states are neither party nor signatory to it. I have already had a number of bilateral meetings with senior representatives of these states to convince them to join and I hope that the Review Conference will send out a strong message to these states and encourage them to become State Parties.

As we move further into what has been called “the century of biology”, in order to stay relevant, the BWC that has been particularly impacted by these developments also needs to adapt to advances in science and technology. One of the main purposes of the Review Conference is exactly to take into account these developments when reviewing the operation of the Convention. is

Disarmament as an area of ‘high politics’ has traditionally been a core function in the domain of the state. However, not least due to the ever increasing engagement and influence of civil society, it is evident that arms control and disarmament is no longer exclusively an intergovernmental issue between states. New actors like civil society, industry and scientific communities have increasingly engaged over the last years in various aspects of BWC implementation and hold a more influential role. I personally see this trend as positive and it is my firm conviction that only an all-inclusive and collaborative approach can further reinforce the existing norm against biological weapons.

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The BWC is approaching a crossroads and views among States Parties about the way ahead still differ. It is my hope that in the run-up to the Review Conference we can identify areas of agreement which can then be codified at the Review Conference in November and translated into a substantive package for the medium-term future of the BWC. Even if it is going to be challenging, I remain hopeful that States Parties will find constructive and innovative solutions to move forward.

Multilateral arms control and disarmament regimes and initiatives, including the Biological Weapons Convention, are faced with a number of formidable challenges. The only way to tackle these multifaceted threats is to approach them in a multifaceted and all-inclusive manner, which involves all relevant stakeholders and addresses these dangers at the national, regional and international level.

The overall success of multilateral arms control and disarmament regimes ultimately depends on the political will, confidence and mutual trust exhibited by its regime members. While the current political climate may not seem a particularly constructive one, windows of opportunity do still present themselves from time to time. It therefore remains important to prepare for them by continuously exploring and examining potential solutions. The Eighth Review Conference represents such an important opportunity and related expectations and stakes for it are high. It is my hope that the Review Conference produces a rejuvenated BWC with its adaptability and relevance enhanced to face the challenges with which it will invariably be presented. I will do my utmost to help us reach that goal.