

**REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE  
CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE  
DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING  
OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND  
TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION**

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SIXTH MEETING

Hold at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Friday, 7 March 1980, at 11 a.m.

President:

Mr. VAERINØ

(Norway)

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(a) General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.50 a.m.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE CONVENTION AS PROVIDED FOR IN ITS ARTICLE XII  
(agenda item 10)

(a) GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. ONKELINX (Belgium) said that, during the negotiations in 1971, the question of bacteriological weapons had rightly been separated from that of chemical weapons. Although the negotiations on the prohibition of chemical weapons had not yet proved successful, the Bacteriological Weapons Convention constituted an international instrument which was one of the rare successes of the past decade in the disarmament field. The number of countries which had ratified or acceded to it showed the broad international support it had gained; he hoped that that support would shortly become universal.
2. From the standpoint of international law, the use of the words "never in any circumstances" in article I of the Convention was an innovation, since it had hitherto been understood that treaties lapsed in the event of armed conflict. A further innovation was that, ever since its conclusion, the Convention had been considered as the first treaty to contain a genuine disarmament clause. The fact that, according to their statements, every State party to the Convention had respected its provisions should be welcomed.
3. With regard to article IV, Belgium, in common with many other States, had taken the necessary domestic measures, the Belgian Parliament having enacted legislation approving the Convention.
4. On the question of chemical weapons, some people had felt there was a danger that a draft convention covering only bacteriological weapons might encourage the acceleration of the chemical weapons race and lead to diminished interest in negotiations for the prohibition of chemical weapons. However, the description in document BWC/CONF.I/4 of the efforts made in that direction was ample proof that those efforts had never slackened in the Committee on Disarmament in the General Assembly or in relevant bilateral negotiations.
5. With regard to agenda item 11 on future review of the Convention, Belgium would support a flexible approach that would enable the majority of States parties to call, as necessary, either for an ad hoc meeting or for a review conference.
6. Mr. PICTET (Switzerland) welcomed the fact that a large number of States had acceded to the Bacteriological Weapons Convention and expressed the hope that the international community would ratify it in the near future. He noted with satisfaction that the Convention had functioned effectively. Scientific developments since the entry into force of the Convention appeared to pose no new threat, at least in the immediate future, and no case of violation of the Convention had been alleged. That was a further source of satisfaction, but in the absence of a genuine international control procedure the international community had to rely entirely on statements made by one party or another, and that was not an entirely satisfactory situation.
7. Since it had possessed no bacteriological or toxin weapons before the conclusion of the Convention, Switzerland had had no stocks to destroy. With regard to the other States parties, he regretted that they had not all given formal assurances on that point. The Swiss army actually had a biological branch, but its sole purpose was to care for the health of army personnel; it would play only a protective role if bacteriological weapons were used against Switzerland in an armed conflict.

8. As far as chemical weapons were concerned, Switzerland considered that such weapons at present posed the most dangerous threat after nuclear weapons. It was therefore following with great interest the current activities aimed at their prohibition. Prohibition should cover both lethal agents and incapacitating agents which caused lasting psychological injury. Switzerland would, however, prefer a prohibition that was limited to a small number of agents but was effective and controllable, rather than a broader prohibition whose terms were too general or which appeared difficult to monitor. However, the use of simple chemical agents, particularly those intended for the maintenance of domestic order, must continue to be authorized. Prohibition should be total but if, in certain cases, only limitation of use was provided for, the applicable criteria should be simple and clearly defined so that they could be applied without undue difficulty of interpretation for the responsible military command.

9. Prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and their destruction would be unacceptable without fully effective international control. Any convention that did not provide for such control would be not only ineffective but even dangerous because of the false sense of security it might engender. It would therefore be preferable to await the development of a fully satisfactory control system; meanwhile, all States should accede to the Geneva Protocol of 17 June 1925 and thus create a situation which would be tantamount to a general prohibition of first use of a broad range of chemical weapons.

10. Lastly, Switzerland considered that any new convention should comprise the same rights and obligations for all States, since the principle of equality of States should be respected in the disarmament field as in other fields.

11. With regard to the future of the Conference, his delegation was in favour of the convening of further review conferences at regular intervals, so that continued account could be taken of new scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention.

12. Mr. FARNON (New Zealand) reminded the Conference that the Convention had been regarded as a significant step forward on the road to disarmament. However, only 87 States had become parties to it and some States of military significance were not among them. That showed the amount of work to be done by the Conference.

13. Since New Zealand possessed none of the weapons or delivery systems referred to in article I of the Convention, his Government had not considered it necessary to enact any special legislation prohibiting the activities in question.

14. After taking note of the conclusions reached by the depositary Governments in their background paper to the effect that the Convention covered all recent scientific and technological developments relevant for weapon purposes, he observed that the question of the relationship between the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the Convention was of concern to his delegation. Article VIII provided that nothing in the Convention should be interpreted as in any way limiting or detracting from the obligations assumed by any State under the 1925 Geneva Protocol. He therefore appealed to countries which maintained reservations to the Protocol to declare them null and void, at least with regard to biological and toxin weapons.

15. With regard to chemical weapons, his delegation was optimistic about the early conclusion of a convention to prohibit such weapons now that the Committee on Disarmament had established a working group on the subject.

16. In accordance with article X of the Convention, New Zealand had participated on a number of occasions in exchanges of equipment, materials and scientific and technical information on the use of biological agents and toxins for peaceful purposes, and had co-operated in the development of bacteriology for peaceful purposes. In the opinion of his delegation, such exchanges should be encouraged.

17. His delegation was in favour of a periodic review of the Convention, as an important means of guaranteeing compliance with it. A five-yearly review would be adequate for that purpose.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.