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Working paper submitted by Cuba

The Special Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Biological Weapons, which was held in 1994, established the mandate for this Ad Hoc Group, whose main objective has been the preparation of a legally binding international instrument to strengthen the Convention.

The Fourth Review Conference of the Parties to the Convention, which was held in 1996, confirmed that mandate and urged the Ad Hoc Group to complete its work before the commencement of the Fifth Review Conference, to be held at the end of the current year.

If we include VEREX, we have been absorbed for almost a decade in arduous negotiation, which has demonstrated the political will of the great majority of States parties to produce a Protocol that will fulfil the objective of strengthening the Convention.

As a result of our work, we have on the table two useful working documents: the rolling text, arising from collective discussion, which reflects the positions of all the participants in these negotiations; and the composite text, which represents a praiseworthy effort by the Chairman to achieve compromise solutions on the most delicate issues.

At the beginning of this session, it was clear that the document BWC/AD HOC GROUP/CRP.8 enjoyed considerable support as a basis on which to continue negotiations and to complete our mandate successfully prior to the Fifth Review Conference of the Convention.

Nevertheless, just as we were nearing the end of this process and disregarding a decade of serious collective work, on 25 July last the United States, in rejecting the composite text, boycotted the successful culmination of our efforts.

This is how we have reached the point where we are now, that is, preparing a report on this session, the only work option which the United States delegation has left us.

Once again they have placed us in an extremely complex situation. They have refused for the report to reflect the reality of what has happened factually and objectively. Obviously, the exact reflection of the facts would reveal to the international community and to world public opinion the attitude they have adopted, which is opposed to compromise and to the political will of the other States.

The delegation of Cuba has taken an active part in discussing the report. It has endeavoured at all times to be flexible and to arrive at consensual solutions which are fair and objective.

In our view, the report on this session should be simple and factual, this last word being taken in the sense of an objective appreciation of what has happened, thus providing the international community with a useful document expressing the facts, which some very special interests are trying to hide.

Nevertheless, the United States, with their usual arrogance, have placed all types of obstacles in the way of achieving consensual solutions, which are both fair and objective, and, with their intransigence, have prevented us from arriving at a compromise which is acceptable to all parties.

Despite the fact that we have no report for this session, for Cuba preserving the mandate established by the Special Conference of the States Parties to the Convention held in 1994 will continue to be an important objective.

Cuba's position has been clear and sincere throughout the negotiating process. Our action has always been guided by legitimate and genuine interests. At the beginning of this session, we indicated our sincere availability, without overlooking questions of principle, to continue acting constructively in the pursuit of consensus and the higher interests of the international community in its struggle against the scourge of biological weapons.

Nevertheless, our predictions that the protocol was in danger were soon fulfilled. The greatest world Power turned its back on a decade of international efforts, flatly rejecting the product of these arduous negotiations. With that deplorable decision, they have merely reasserted with absolute clarity their hegemonic opposition to multilateralism.

What has happened in this session of the Ad Hoc Group is merely another link in a long and dangerous chain of unilateral positions, which the United States have recently been adopting on several key issues of the international agenda.

Just to take some concrete, recent examples, we should like to recall the pressures exerted by that country to prevent the implementation of the provisions arising from the Kyoto Protocol; the manoeuvres to prevent the inclusion of major substantive issues in the Plan of Action adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and All Its Aspects; the permanent blockage in the Disarmament Conference regarding issues considered as priority by the whole international community, such as nuclear disarmament and

the prevention of the arms race in outer space; or the preparations made to deploy an anti-missile defence system in violation of the provisions of ABM Treaty, which we recognize as the cornerstone of world strategic stability.

What has happened within the framework of this Ad Hoc Group, moreover, is no more than the tailpiece of that long list of deplorable events. There are probably many similar situations awaiting us in the future.

The United States delegation has tried to attenuate its attitude by announcing that they intend to develop alternative ideas and approaches, with the objective of achieving consensus on our common goal, which is strengthening the Convention on Biological Weapons.

It is our duty to warn the international community against this new manipulation. The mandate we were given by the 1994 Special Conference cannot and must not be manipulated. No new proposal involving unilateral, selective or discriminatory approaches can rely on the consensus of the States parties to the Convention on Biological Weapons.

A statement made by the American Secretary of State last 30 July, published by Reuters News Agency, in Canberra, Australia, says it clearly: "The United States view is not just that the protocol is not in our, the United States', interest. We don't think it serves the job for the world. We don't believe the convention is verifiable".

In other words, they have made us waste our valuable time for more than a decade. They have never really trusted the process. They do not even believe that the Convention is verifiable, and therefore, capable of being strengthened. We must not be misled; any future proposal presented unilaterally will be intended only to perpetuate that country's hegemony and its stubborn policy of opposition to multilateralism.

We have evolving before us an international scenario which is extremely dangerous and which can have very negative implications for the whole system of multilateral negotiations in the sphere of disarmament. We cannot remain indifferent before the real possibility that hegemonic powers may act in full impunity, ignoring the complaints of the international community and taking drastic decisions with regard to disarmament, outside multilateral forums.

It is our prime, collective responsibility as States to oppose this kind of behaviour. We shall never be able to achieve this objective, however, without the valuable support of other important actors, such as the non-governmental organizations and the media. International public opinion must be made aware of the risks we are running and of the need to act in time to prevent them.

Cuba is still committed to the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group, as it was established by the Special Conference of the States Parties to the Convention in 1994. Preserving the continuity and effectiveness of this process continues to be a major objective. And in our view such an objective can only be achieved, however, in the context of multilateral negotiations, within the framework of and with the purpose of strengthening the Convention.
