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Strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention

Key Points for the Fourth Review Conference

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FOREWORD

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) of 1972 and its successive Review Conferences have established an international norm prohibiting completely the development, production, stockpiling and acquisition of biological or toxin weapons and embracing all development in microbiology, genetic engineering and biotechnology. However, over the past five years since the last Review Conference, there has been less confidence in the Convention on account of several developments:

* The admission in April 1992 that the Former Soviet Union, although a codepositary of the BTWC along with the UK and the US, had continued an offensive programme for 20 years after signing the BTWC up to 1992.

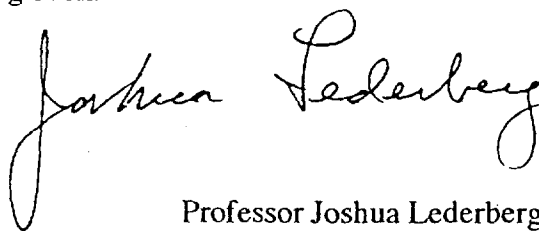
* The disclosure in 1995 by Iraq to the United Nations Special Commission that it had developed and deployed biological and toxin weapons including over 160 aerial bombs and 25 Al Hussein missile warheads to four locations by the start of the Gulf Conflict in 1991.

* The report that the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan had been close to completing a biological weapons capability underlines the importance of States Parties adopting national legislation to criminalize biological weapons (BW) and thereby deter sub-State actors from considering the acquisition and use of BW.

With the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995 and the imminent entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), there is a real need and opportunity to strengthen the BTWC. Additional impetus comes from the world-wide increased concern about infectious diseases, whether new or re-emerging, as biological warfare is but the deliberate use of disease to cause harm to humans, animals or plants.

The progress made since the Third Review Conference towards a strengthened BTWC is greatly welcomed. The Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts to consider potential verification measures from a scientific and technical viewpoint (VEREX) met twice in 1992 and twice in 1993 and produced a final report in which 21 measures were identified, examined and evaluated. This final report was considered by a Special Conference in 1994 which mandated an Ad Hoc Group (AHG) to consider appropriate measures, including possible verification measures, so as to draft proposals to strengthen the Convention in a legally binding instrument. The AHG has thus far held four substantive meetings, twice in 1995 and twice in 1996, and has made progress. The Fourth Review Conference should give added momentum and impetus to the work of the AHG by endorsing the core elements of the legally binding instrument and setting the date for a Special Conference of States Parties to adopt the report of the AHG.

This briefing book is intended to provide quality information to States Parties about the key issues relevant to each Article of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in a manner which will aid and inform the preparation by States Parties for their participation in the Fourth Review Conference to be held in Geneva on 25 November to 6 December 1996. The Department of Peace Studies of the University of Bradford, the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, and the individual authors are to be commended for the initiative they have taken in preparing this comprehensive and informative briefing book.



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