



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIPLOMACY IN ACTION



Preventing Biological Weapons Proliferation and Bioterrorism

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Address to the Annual Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention

Geneva, Switzerland

December 9, 2009

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, thank you for your warm welcome.

Before I begin, I want to recognize our Chairman, Ambassador Grinius, for his personal commitment to this issue. His skill in bringing ideas and expertise together to explore opportunities, and to improve international disease surveillance under the BWC umbrella have been invaluable.

The United States is confident that with your leadership, progress made this year on disease surveillance can translate into sustainable commitments. I also want to acknowledge the quiet but solid behind-the-scenes work of the Implementation Support Unit. Thank you.

I have come here today to share with you [President Obama's strategy for preventing biological weapons proliferation and bioterrorism](#).

The United States intends to implement this strategy through renewed cooperation and more thorough consultations with our international counterparts in order to prevent the misuse and abuse of science while working together to strengthen health security around the world.

When it comes to the proliferation of bio weapons and the risk of an attack, the world community faces a greater threat based on a new calculus. President Obama fully recognizes that a major biological weapons attack on one of the world's major cities could cause as much death and economic and psychological damage as a nuclear attack.

And while the United States remains concerned about state-sponsored biological warfare and proliferation, we are equally, if not MORE concerned, about an act of bioterrorism, due to the increased access to advances in the life sciences.

Around the world, we are experiencing an unparalleled period of scientific advancement and innovation in biology.

Techniques that once were cutting edge innovations are now commonplace. Capabilities once found only in a few advanced laboratories are increasingly wide-spread.

We ALL hope that this science is used for good, but we cannot ignore that it also can be used for ill.

Neither I, nor anyone else in the Obama Administration, need any further evidence of the terrible nature and consequences of a bioterrorism attack. I have, unfortunately, seen the dangers of bioterrorism up close. I served as a Member of Congress when a small amount of anthrax was mailed to the United States Senate in October 2001, just weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

A few envelopes containing anthrax spores paralyzed the Congress. The office buildings of both the House and the Senate were closed down almost immediately. My offices in the Longworth Building were closed for 8 weeks to be sanitized. Five people who came into contact with spores from the letters were killed and hundreds more were put on antibiotics. Years later, no one has been brought to justice and it appears that a single person may have perpetrated these attacks.

This underscores the fact that significant capabilities for harm are already available to small groups and individuals and the prospect of bioterrorism represents a growing risk for the global community. Already we have seen terrorist groups like Al Qa'ida seek biological materials and expertise in order to conduct a biological attack.

That is why we in the United States are calling for all of you to join us in bolstering the Biological Weapons Convention, the premier forum for dealing with biological threats.

The Obama administration's new strategy for countering biological threats—both natural and man-made—rests upon the main principle of the Biological Weapons Convention: that the use of biological weapons is “repugnant to the conscience of mankind.”

That's why we believe we have developed an approach that strikes a balance between supporting scientific progress and curbing and stopping the potential for abuse.

Over the last several months, the Obama administration has engaged in a thorough review of our approach with scientists, academics, NGO's and government officials.

We have determined that we have made considerable progress in recognizing and responding to a potential biological attack or outbreak of disease, although we can do more.

More importantly, the Administration concluded that there was no comprehensive strategy to address gaps in our efforts to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons and scientific abuse.

So just last week President Obama approved a new *National Strategy for Countering Biological Threats*.

Our new strategy has a clear, overarching goal ... to protect against the misuse of science to develop or use biological agents to cause harm.

Copies of that strategy have been supplied to all of you. I would like to request that the strategy document be circulated as an official conference room paper.

Let me outline the broad goals of the strategy:

First, we will work with the international community to promote the peaceful and beneficial use of life sciences, in accordance with the BWC's Article Ten, to combat infectious diseases regardless of their cause. We will work to promote global health security by increasing the availability of and access to knowledge and products of the life sciences to help reduce the impact from outbreaks of infectious disease whether of natural, accidental or deliberate origin.

Second, we will work toward establishing and reinforcing norms against the misuse of the life sciences. We need to ensure a culture of responsibility, awareness, and vigilance among all who use and benefit from the life sciences to ensure that they are not diverted to harmful purpose.

Third, we will implement a coordinated approach to influence, identify, inhibit, and interdict those who seek to misuse scientific progress to harm innocent people. We will seek to obtain timely and accurate information on the full spectrum of threats and challenges. This information will allow us to take appropriate actions to manage the evolving risk.

Finally, and most relevant to this body, we want to reinvigorate the Biological Weapons Convention as the premier forum for global outreach and coordination. The Biological Weapons Convention embodies the international community's determination to prevent the misuse of biological materials as weapons. But it takes the active efforts of its States Parties – individually, and collectively – to uphold these commitments that continue to bolster the BWC as a key international norm.

The United States wants to work to ensure that this is the principal forum dedicated to these issues. We appreciate and applaud this forum's past efforts, and commit to engaging fully as we work together towards our common goals.

Before describing our proposals to reinvigorate the BWC, let me reiterate that the Obama Administration's commitment to the Biological Weapons Convention is steadfast. The United States will continue to meet its Article One commitments not to develop, acquire, produce or possess biological weapons.

But I want to be clear and forthcoming and I hope this will not be a surprise to anyone. The Obama Administration will not seek to revive negotiations on a verification protocol to the Convention. We have carefully reviewed previous efforts to develop a verification protocol and have determined that a legally binding protocol would not achieve meaningful verification or greater security.

It is extraordinarily difficult to verify compliance. The ease with which a biological weapons program could be disguised within legitimate activities and the rapid advances in biological research make it very difficult to detect violations. We believe that a protocol would not be able to keep pace with the rapidly changing nature of the biological weapons threat.

Instead, we believe that confidence in BWC compliance should be promoted by enhanced transparency about activities and pursuing compliance diplomacy to address concerns.

I know there are some that may disagree with this decision. Instead, I would urge you to join us in implementing the more robust BWC activities already underway.

We want to develop a rigorous, comprehensive program of cooperation, information exchange, and coordination that builds on and modifies as necessary the existing Work Program approach.

As we look toward the 2011 Review Conference, the United States believes that a reinvigorated, comprehensive Work Program is the best way to strengthen the Convention. So I would ask you to demonstrate your good faith and commitment to the BWC by joining us in increasing transparency, improving confidence building measures and engaging in more robust bilateral compliance discussions.

To highlight our three areas of emphasis in this area, let me provide a bit more detail about our goals.

First, we seek to promote confidence in effective treaty implementation:

A key consideration related to any treaty is the ongoing need to promote confidence in compliance. We believe that greater emphasis should be placed on voluntary measures to provide increased confidence. We must also increase participation in the existing Confidence-Building Measures. We should work together to review the Confidence Building Measures forms to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. States Parties, in conjunction

with the Implementation Support Unit, should provide appropriate assistance to meet these goals.

In a gesture of our transparency, I want to announce that the United States will

- Invite the 2010 Chairman to visit our National Interagency Biodefense Campus in Maryland. The facilities there include the high containment laboratories of three different U.S. government agencies and provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the steps we are taking to ensure safe and secure research for the benefit of public health, and;
- Work toward posting future annual CBM submissions on the public access side of the Implementation Support Unit website and we will encourage other Parties to follow suit.

As part of this effort, we must seek to make membership in the BWC universal. We will be looking to work with you on outreach efforts to countries that have not yet joined the Convention.

Second, we will seek to enhance cooperation through the BWC on natural and deliberate disease threats to complement the work being done by the World Health Organization and other international bodies. In order to implement our Article Ten commitments, it is critical that we work together to achieve, sustain and improve international capacity to detect, report, and respond to outbreaks of disease, whether deliberate, accidental or natural. This includes implementation of the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations.

Fundamentally, if we improve a country's ability to respond to natural outbreaks, we have improved their capability to deal with bioterrorism.

In this respect, the United States is dedicated to continuing our substantial assistance and we want to work closely with other BWC States Parties to enhance and coordinate these efforts - including through the G-8 Global Partnership, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 and other mechanisms.

The BWC should be fully utilized as a forum to inform States Parties of related bilateral and regional activities, to consult on new avenues of multilateral engagement, and to promote the support of the international community.

Greater cooperation and technical assistance are key to achieving and sustaining the capabilities we need to prevent biological weapons use and to combat infectious diseases.

To this end:

- The Center for Disease Control will soon become the world's first World Health Organization Collaborating Center for implementing International

Health Regulations. It will assist the WHO and other international partners to help build the necessary global infrastructure to fully implement the IHRs in all six WHO Regions.

- In May, we propose a two-day meeting to share information on offers to support IHR implementation, hear from those receiving assistance about their experiences and to make specific suggestions for improvement.
- We will follow up with a meeting in August that builds upon the May discussion and looks at new technologies and new approaches to build the core capacities on disease surveillance needed under the IHRs.

As the final piece of our strategy to enhance this forum, we want to make the BWC the premier forum for discussion of the full range of biological threats – including bioterrorism – and mutually agreeable steps States can take for risk management.

The BWC should provide an international forum for advancing the dialogue on pathogen security and laboratory biosafety practices, and for promoting legislation, guidelines and standards through cooperation and partnership.

We must work here to develop international standards and practices for these important elements that advance our mutual security. To this end, we would like to announce that:

- Our FBI and CDC have developed best practices and guides on the conduct of joint criminal and epidemiological investigations of suspected intentional biological threats or incidents. We will bring our experts to discuss this in more detail at the August Experts Meeting.
- We also propose a workshop just after the August Experts Meeting where all interested countries can share information on bio risk management training, standards, and needs.

The threat of a bio attack is much like other transnational threats and challenges that we face today: climate change, nuclear proliferation, and food security. We're all in the same boat and none of us, no matter how big, can afford to go it alone.

The United States takes biological weapons threats very seriously and that's why we have adopted an energetic new approach that is tailored to counter today's threats.

In closing, I want to thank you for this opportunity to reaffirm the Obama Administration's support for revitalizing the BWC. I hope to join you once again at the 2011 Review Conference as we continue to move forward together on the critical work of countering biological threats.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.