



**Ninth Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Geneva, November 28-December 16, 2022.**

## **GENERAL DEBATE**

**STATEMENT BY THE HEAD OF THE CUBAN DELEGATION, AMBASSADOR RODOLFO BENÍTEZ VERNON, GENERAL DIRECTOR OF MULTILATERAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. November 29, 2022.**

Mr. President:

I congratulate you on your election, as well as the other members of the Bureau. We wish you success and count on our full support.

We thank the participating delegations for the election of Cuba as Vice President of the Conference, a responsibility that we will carry out with professionalism and commitment.

We subscribe to the statement made by Azerbaijan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We congratulate the sister Republic of Namibia on its recent accession to the Convention.

Mr. President:

The Biological Weapons Convention needs to be strengthened. This Review Conference will be a failure if it does not reach concrete agreements to achieve that goal. We must act without further delay.

It is unjustifiable that 50 years after its approval, the Convention continues to lack a mechanism to verify compliance.

This Review Conference must adopt a clear mandate to resume negotiations for a legally binding Protocol that would strengthen the Convention in a comprehensive and balanced manner, and allow for its verification.

We do not agree with those who affirm that the current geopolitical context does not allow strengthening the Convention by adopting said Protocol. On the contrary, its urgent need is clearer today than ever.

The status quo is unacceptable and only benefits those who oppose the strengthening of the multilateral disarmament system.

The Verification Protocol negotiations cannot start from scratch, ignoring the significant progress achieved during 10 years of intense and serious work, interrupted abruptly and unilaterally by the United States in 2001, when the text of the Protocol was practically ready for formal adoption.

Mr. President:

In the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, the United States government intensified, to unprecedented levels, its unilateral and criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba, including in the biological field.

As a result, the arrival to our country of essential supplies and equipment to face the pandemic was made difficult or prevented.

Even the acquisition of medical oxygen and pulmonary ventilators, which Cuba had to manufacture with its own prototypes, was hindered.

The blockade affects our national production of basic medicines, including antibiotics, analgesics, hypotensives, and treatments for cancer and heart disease. Our children cannot use, for example, American-made biological heart valves.

The economic effects suffered by our country as a consequence of this illegal blockade exceed 15 million dollars a day. The tremendous human damage is impossible to quantify.

The blockade against Cuba is a flagrant violation of Article X of the Convention, by virtue of which the States Parties, including the United States, have undertaken to facilitate the widest possible exchange of equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information for the use for peaceful purposes of biological agents and toxins, including for disease prevention.

Similarly, the blockade against Cuba violates the obligation established by the Convention not to hinder the economic or technological development of the States Parties. The illegal blockade against our country must stop immediately.

Article X cannot continue to be relegated. What happened with COVID 19, when certain States with greater resources hoarded the available vaccines for their exclusive use, is further evidence that developing countries require more assistance and cooperation within the framework of the Convention.

We have to adopt concrete and effective mechanisms to guarantee the full application of Article X. Cuba supports the creation of a Cooperation Committee and a dispute settlement mechanism under that Article, in addition to strengthening the existing database.

Mr. President:

Cuba has presented three national documents as a contribution to this Conference.

- Document BWC/CONF.IX/WP.6: Referring to the blockade of the United States against Cuba as a violation of Article X of the Convention.
- Document BWC/CONF.IX/WP.7: On the national implementation of the Convention.
- And document BWC/CONF.IX/WP.8: which contains a Cuban proposal to resume negotiations for a legally binding Protocol to strengthen the Convention.

Likewise, our country reiterates its willingness to share its modest experience in the application of the Convention with other interested States Parties, based on a robust national control system, which includes a broad

legislative and administrative body, and a rigorous system of national inspections.

I conclude by reaffirming Cuba's firm commitment to the Biological Weapons Convention. We will contribute as much as possible, through our active and constructive participation, to the success of the Review Conference.

Thank you.