



**Seventh Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention
Statement by Ambassador Peter Woolcott
Australian Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
and Ambassador for Disarmament
Geneva, 5 December 2011**

Mr President,

May I congratulate you on your appointment as President of this Seventh Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. Australia appreciates your active efforts, transparency and consultative approach in preparing for this Review Conference. We look forward to working with you and your leadership team – Ambassador Desra Percaya of Indonesia and Ms Judit Körömi of Hungary – to ensure a successful Conference.

Mr President,

Since its entry into force in 1975, the BWC has both underpinned an international consensus against biological weapons and supported international efforts to promote biological science and technology for peaceful purposes.

During the last intersessional period, States Parties have continued to collaborate on advancing effective national implementation on a practical level, with strong support from the Implementation Support Unit.

There has also been much valuable direct collaboration on health-security capacity-building. As an example, Australia has been working with partners in our region to help build capacity in disease surveillance systems. In one such program, Australia is working with partners in our region to build animal health institutions to increase capacity to recognise new diseases emerging in animals which may also infect humans. The health and security benefits of such collaborations are clear.

But Mr President,

While there has been much focused and positive effort within the BWC community since our last Review Conference, our Convention continues to face significant challenges.

Ten States have joined the BWC since the last Review Conference – and we welcome them to our community of BWC States Parties – but thirty-one States still remain outside.

Rapid advances in life sciences and the increasing globalisation of biotechnology, which promise many benefits to humankind and to the BWC's implementation, are also changing the nature of the possible threats the BWC is required to address. Are we as States Parties keeping up with these advances in our national implementation of the Convention?

There are concerns that terrorist groups remain determined to develop or acquire biological weapons, especially with increasing availability of relevant materials.

In light of these and other challenges, this Conference is our opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the BWC and ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

Mr President,

In the preparations for this Conference, many States Parties have identified a common set of issues requiring action. These were highlighted in the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the JACKSNNZ countries.

With this in mind, Australia, in consultation with partners, has made several proposals which we consider would assist in strengthening the implementation of the Convention. We believe that this Conference should:

- refine the intersessional process so that it provides for greater flexibility and continuity in the way in which States Parties address important implementation-related issues;
- mandate a conceptual discussion among States Parties to develop common understandings on compliance through the establishment of an open-ended intersessional working group on confidence building and compliance issues;
- mandate more frequent reviews by States Parties of relevant advances in science and technology through the establishment of an open-ended intersessional working group on science and technology and on education and awareness-raising within the scientific community; and
- assist in focusing States Parties' international cooperation and assistance efforts through the establishment of an open-ended intersessional working group on cooperation and assistance.

Beyond these proposals, Australia recognises a range of other decisions this Conference should take, including on:

- greater coordination in promoting BWC universalisation and national implementation as means to raise barriers to biological weapons proliferation (including bioterrorism) and to promote the peaceful uses of biology;
- strengthening the CBM process so that it encourages greater participation, offers greater transparency and is more effective in building confidence in compliance with the Convention; and
- renewing the Implementation Support Unit in a manner which preserves and consolidates its efficient, effective and professional operations in support of States Parties.

Australia looks forward to constructive discussions on these and others proposals during this Conference.

Mr President,

At the end of this Conference, our work will not be complete. Conventions do not implement themselves; they require sustained and practical efforts to meet the challenges in an evolving strategic and scientific environment. However, this Conference enables us to define better the parameters of those efforts in practical and forward-looking ways.

Australia looks forward to working with all States Parties, so that we do take this opportunity and ensure that the BWC remains effective in meeting the challenges we all face.