



NEW ZEALAND

**SEVENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT,
PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL)
AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION**

GENERAL DEBATE

**STATEMENT BY DELL HIGGIE
AMBASSADOR FOR DISARMAMENT**

5 DECEMBER 2011

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr President,

It is a pleasure to see you in the chair for this Review Conference. You can be assured of the full support of the New Zealand delegation as you guide us in our important work over the coming weeks.

I am also pleased to associate my delegation with the statement delivered earlier this afternoon by Canada on behalf also of Japan, Australia, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway and my own country New Zealand (the JACKSNNZ).

As we begin the seventh review of its operation, there can be no doubt that the Biological Weapons Convention remains an integral part of the disarmament and non-proliferation fabric and an indispensable tool in global efforts to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Our gathering provides an important opportunity to take stock of the Convention and its applicability against current international settings. It is an opportunity to recognise and build upon the good work that is already taking place and to identify areas for further improvement.

Mr President,

As a result of the excellent preparatory work that has been undertaken, there is a clear understanding of the key issues for this Review Conference. New Zealand welcomes the proposals that have been made by States parties aimed at strengthening the Convention and its implementation.

In the absence of a formal compliance regime, the confidence building measures mechanism has become an important tool to promote implementation of the Convention and to share experiences and best practices in this regard. We support all efforts to increase participation in the confidence building measures process, including improvements to the reporting forms to make them more user-friendly and relevant. We recognise the valuable work that has been undertaken on this over the course of the intersessional period. We note also proposals for some form of factual analysis to be undertaken of the information provided and would see this as useful in progressing the Convention's implementation.

The fast moving pace of developments in the life-sciences presents a unique challenge for the Convention. It is important that there is a robust system in place to ensure that the Convention remains relevant in the light of contemporary scientific and technological developments. A number of interesting proposals have been made in this regard which are certainly worth further consideration.

Assistance and co-operation – as envisaged in Article X of the Convention – are key elements in the full realisation of the Convention's objectives. We look forward to our discussions in the coming weeks on how co-operation and assistance might be better facilitated.

New Zealand has been involved in this review period in a wide range of international co-operation activities covering issues such as pandemic planning, emergency preparedness and response, disease surveillance, biosafety and biosecurity. New Zealand also contributes relevant training and scholarship assistance as part of its overseas development assistance for developing countries. Reference laboratory services are available to researchers and health workers in other countries, and materials are regularly exchanged, particularly with our Pacific Island partners.

The good work that has been undertaken in the past intersessional process has demonstrated the value of regular, targeted meetings to ensure the good health and ongoing relevance of the Convention and its implementation. There is potential for the intersessional process to better serve implementation of the Convention and we would see merit in a targeted intersessional approach – perhaps adopting a working group or standing committee mechanism – to take forward the Convention's objectives and to ensure that it remains up-to-date with current developments. A number of interesting proposals have been made in this regard and are certainly worth further study.

The Implementation Support Unit (ISU) has proven itself to be an indispensable part of the Convention's framework. Richard Lennane and his team are to be commended for their excellent work in supporting States parties in their implementation of the Convention. New Zealand supports a measured enhancement of the ISU to ensure that it can undertake the activities mandated by States parties in a full and effective manner.

Mr President,

Advances in life sciences and biotechnology, coupled with increased concerns over the threat of bio-terrorism, mean that this meeting is being held at an important juncture. It is vital that the Convention remains relevant and ready to meet these challenges.

This Review Conference provides an excellent opportunity for us all to work towards an outcome that serves to enhance our collective security. My delegation looks forward to working with all States parties and with you and your team, Mr President, towards the achievement of this goal.