



STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ABDUL SAMAD MINTY, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, DURING THE SEVENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE BACTERIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION (BTWC), 5 DECEMBER 2011

Mr. President,

On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to extend our congratulations to you on your appointment to preside over this important meeting. I assure you of my delegation's full co-operation and support in ensuring a successful conclusion to our deliberations.

South Africa also associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Non-Aligned Movement and Other States Parties to the BTWC.

Mr President,

The threat of biological weapons remains a concern for South Africa. One cannot underestimate the ease with which these weapons can be acquired and manufactured. To this end, South Africa is dedicated to the strengthening of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), and maintains its support for efforts to the realisation of a strong, effective and universally accepted Convention. South Africa shares the view that a legally binding instrument is necessary to strengthen the Convention and improve its implementation, and that such an instrument should remain a goal. However, South Africa does not agree that the only route to obtain such a goal is through full time negotiations. South Africa is also open to other means of strengthening the Convention, and believes that these mechanisms should not be ignored when such negotiations are not practically possible. In this regard, South Africa will make a number of proposals aimed at achieving our shared objective of strengthening the Convention and its implementation.

Mr. President,

South Africa appreciates and looks forward to the work that is before States Parties in ensuring the success of the Seventh BTWC Review Conference. It is with these deliberations that the foundations can be laid to map the future of implementable decisions for the benefit of all States Parties in an effort to broaden the scope and universalisation of the Convention, as well as to prioritise, in a meaningful way, the many issues before us.

One of the most important issues to be considered during the Review Conference is the question of the intersessional process. South Africa is of the view that the utilisation of the intersessional period is crucial for the future strengthening of the

Convention; therefore, this Review Conference will have to take some bold, but realistic steps. The intersessional process used during the last 10 years served its purpose successfully. However, my delegation believes that the time is ripe for the improvement of the process in order to further strengthen the Convention and its implementation.

Mr. President,

During the 6th Review Conference, South Africa submitted a Working Paper in which a more substantive process was proposed, but which unfortunately did not find consensus. In this regard, South Africa believes that the time has come for this Review Conference to establish a structured system of meetings with different levels of decision making. South Africa has therefore submitted a Working Paper with detailed proposals for an intersessional process that builds upon the positive elements of the process followed during the last 10 years, but that endeavours to strengthen it in a progressive and sustainable manner.

Mr. President,

On the issue of Article X of the Convention, South Africa believes that as we continue our endeavours to strengthen the BTWC regime, it is vital that we should also focus on the developmental and co-operation features of the Convention. South Africa, as an African country and member of the Non-Aligned Movement, shares the view that Article X should promote the right of States Parties to participate in the exchange of equipment, materials and scientific information for peaceful purposes, and that States Parties in a position to do so, should contribute to the further development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in this field. South Africa also strongly believes, in line with Article X of the Convention, that its implementation should not hamper economic and technological development of the peaceful uses of biological agents, but allow the beneficial elements of these agents to be developed to aid humanity. Article X is very relevant to public health, particularly in the developing world where resources are often scarce and insufficient, and could provide the overlap between international health, technological advancement and the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases worldwide. To this end, South Africa is committed to close collaboration with countries worldwide and within the African Continent on the implementation of the Convention and in the advancement of the goals of the BTWC at large.

South Africa also believes that increased international cooperation and assistance is required to alleviate the burden of threat posed by biological weapons. Initiatives such as the exchange in biological sciences and technology, the promotion of capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis and containment of infectious diseases, among many others, can be further explored. In achieving these objectives, an effective cooperation mechanism in which all States Parties can participate on a voluntary basis could play an important role. South Africa has submitted a Working Paper in which such a mechanism is proposed. The mechanism will provide for offers and requests to be submitted by States Parties to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), and this would facilitate the matching of the offers and requests by notifying States Parties in need, who may then utilise the information provided at their own discretion. The proposed mechanism would also provide for an Open Ended Working Group that will meet during Experts Meeting sessions to discuss the implementation of Article X and the Cooperation Mechanism.

Mr. President,

In addition, there is general agreement that the mandate of the ISU should be extended. Indications are that the tasks of the ISU will increase, and this will have an influence on their capacity and budget. Since the extent of their tasks will only be known at a very late stage, it will not be possible to do proper planning to determine the correct human resource and budgetary requirements for the next 5 years. In this regard, South Africa believes that such planning can only be done properly after the Review Conference, and therefore, the Review Conference should decide on a budget for the first year to allow the continued functioning of the ISU. Thereafter, detailed planning in terms of the structure and budget should be conducted during 2012 for approval by the Meeting of States Parties at the end of 2012, and these should be based on the mandate derived from the decision of this Review Conference.

Mr. President,

It will be recalled that Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) were developed in 1987 and modified in 1991 in a specific political environment with the purpose of improving confidence amongst States Parties by means of providing information required in a number of declaration formats. However, the CBMs have not satisfactorily fulfilled their purpose and therefore, they have to be analysed in terms of their objective and composition. To further explore this point, South Africa has submitted a paper that proposes a two-stage process. One is a longer term process by which the CBM system is analysed during the intersessional period to develop a replacement for the present CBM system, and the other a short term revision of the current CBM declaration format in order to rationalise them and improve their clarity.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, South Africa would like to acknowledge and thank the ISU for the professional manner in which they have conducted their work with the limited funding and human resources at their disposal. Given the circumstances, their dedication is commendable.

South Africa would also like to encourage all States Parties to the Convention to work as a collective in achieving the goals of the Convention with the spirit of cooperation and keenness that is needed to promote the Convention's goals in order to render meaningful services to humanity and to eradicate the threat of biological weapons and diseases.

Mr. President, I thank you.