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**Septième Conférence d'examen
de la Convention sur les armes biologiques**

Déclaration

**prononcée par l'Ambassadeur Alexandre Fasel
Représentant permanent de la Suisse
auprès de la Conférence du désarmement**

Débat général

Genève, le 5 décembre 2011

Check against delivery

**Seventh Review Conference
of the Biological Weapons Convention**

Statement

**by Ambassador Alexandre Fasel
Permanent Representative of Switzerland
to the Conference on Disarmament**

General Debate

Geneva, 5 December 2011

Mr. President,

Switzerland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Ambassador of Canada on behalf of the JACKSNNZ group. I would also like to join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election as President of the Seventh Review Conference and assure you of our full support. Your motto of "ambitious realism" seems an appropriate guiding principle to ensure a successful Review Conference.

Switzerland is pleased to note that the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is in a rather good shape. Over the course of the last four years, States Parties have worked together in a collegial and constructive manner and have reached much common ground. This Conference can now build on what has been achieved. We should seize this opportunity and take various decisions to further strengthen the BWC's norms, their implementation and the institutional framework in which we continue our work.

Mr. President,

As it is the case of all weapons of mass destruction, a use of biological weapons would result in unspeakable humanitarian suffering, psychological trauma and serious social and economic disruption.

The immorality itself of biological weapons is commonly accepted. In contrast to nuclear weapons, B-weapons are entirely and utterly delegitimized. Developing, producing, stockpiling or using such weapons is equally proscribed, and this ban applies to all states worldwide – in other words, we are all "have nots"! The moral ban of B-weapons is a significant distinctive feature as compared to the domain of nuclear weapons, where such norms have yet to be developed and the transition to exclusively peaceful use of technology remains to be undergone.

The merit for these strong norms lies with the BWC as well as with the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Yet biological incidents – both natural and man-made – continue to be very real threats. The challenges we face are manifold and of greatest relevance for future generations.

Mr. President,

In order to ensure that the BWC continues to be the premier forum for the fight against the misuse of biology, there are a number of issues where we consider progress to be crucial.

Achieving **universal adherence** to the Convention must remain a key priority. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mozambique and Burundi for joining the Convention since the last Meeting of States Parties. Increasing the membership to the BWC is an central prerequisite to effectively counter biological weapons proliferation. At a minimum, we should aim to bring into the Convention all those states that still remain outside of the BWC but are parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Switzerland hopes that the Review Conference can decide to strengthen and recalibrate universalisation efforts, including the adoption of an action plan on universality.

Switzerland welcomes the achievements made by the past two **Intersessional Processes**. These sessions enabled the discussion and adoption of "common understandings", as provided for in the mandate of the 2006 Review Conference. Having said that, we consider that the existing set-up was not ideal to ensure that "effective action" could in fact be taken, in line with the mentioned mandate. We believe that this process could be significantly improved in a way to make the BWC more action-oriented. In this sense, we support the creation of open-ended working groups and the restructuring of the annual Meeting of Experts, in order to make it more flexible while ensuring topical continuity. We further suggest that the issue of providing the Meeting of States Parties with the authority to take decisions on specific, clearly-defined issues should also be addressed.

As to **international cooperation**, Switzerland continues to attach great importance to the implementation of Article X. We need to ensure that States Parties in need of assistance to implement the provisions of the Convention can receive the necessary support. In this context, we fully endorse proposals that aim at creating concrete mechanisms that could foster international cooperation in an efficient way.

Switzerland attaches particular importance to the **Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)**. CBMs continue to be the only tool to establish some degree of transparency and confidence among States Parties. But the system shows symptoms of ageing and reveals a number of shortcomings. In addition, participation in this politically binding and in no way voluntary instrument remains relatively low.

Following a comprehensive two-year consultation process, Germany, Norway and my own country, Switzerland, in close cooperation with civil society, have submitted a working paper containing specific suggestions for changes during the upcoming review of CBMs. We very much hope that based on our proposal, the Review Conference will be in a position to adopt concrete and practical improvements of the current CBM format. We believe that pragmatic changes as suggested in our working paper could contribute to higher participation in and greater relevance of this instrument. In a second step, during the next intersessional process, States Parties could then reflect on how to better use and evaluate the contents of CBM returns. As proposed in a second working paper co-submitted by Norway, New Zealand and Switzerland, a working group in the intersessional process could be dedicated to the discussion of issues regarding CBMs.

Mr. President,

It is vital that the BWC does not lose touch with the rapid **developments of biological sciences**. We are in favour of setting up an effective and flexible mechanism to ensure a regular and systematic review of scientific and technological developments.

Another issue of concern is the **potentially harmful misuse of biotechnology** due to its dual-use nature. In close cooperation with representatives from Civil Society, the JACKSNNZ group as well as Kenya, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States have submitted a working paper on this issue. The paper proposes that awareness-raising among life scientists on potential dual-use research should become part and parcel of the BWC implementation process.

Lastly, Switzerland strongly supports the renewal and strengthening of the BWC **Implementation Support Unit's (ISU)** mandate. The ISU has clearly proven its merit in assisting States Parties in implementing the Convention. We believe that a measured enhancement of the ISU's range of activities is a desirable and realistic goal.

Thank you, Mr. President.