

4. CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

Background

The use of chemical weapons during the first world war led the international community to increase its efforts to eliminate them. Such efforts were also extended to the related problem posed by the prospect of biological agents being used as weapons of warfare. By 1925 these initiatives resulted in the signing of the Geneva Protocol, which prohibits the use of "asphyxiating poisonous or other gases, analogous liquids, materials or devices as well as bacteriological (biological) methods of warfare".

The Protocol's failure to ban the development, production and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons, however, led to a growing recognition of the need for more comprehensive restrictions. This goal has been actively pursued in various United Nations disarmament bodies, particularly during the last twenty years.

By 1971, the difficulties of concluding a single agreement banning both chemical and biological weapons led to a decision in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) to consider them separately. Progress in the area of biological weapons control soon followed, producing a convention signed in 1972 which came into force three years later. Considered the first international agreement requiring actual disarmament measures, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) prohibits the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of bacteriological or poisonous weapons, and calls for the destruction of existing stocks. As of 1 July 1987, the Convention had 108 signatories and 26 parties.