

### 3. BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

#### Background

Biological weapons have been used on several occasions in the past. Their use during the First World War led the international community to redouble its efforts to deal with this problem and in 1925 the Geneva Protocol was signed. The Protocol prohibits the use of asphyxiating, poisonous and other gases and of bacteriological processes.

After the Second World War several United Nations organisations recognised the limits of the Protocol and the importance of making it more effective. In 1969 the United States renounced both the production and stockpiling of biological weapons. Negotiations at the UN Conference of the Committee on Disarmament succeeded in producing a Convention on biological weapons in 1972, which came into force three years later. The Convention forbids the use, production, stockpiling or transfer of bacteriological or poisonous weapons and calls for the destruction of existing stocks. The Convention, which 102 states had ratified by 1 January 1986, is seen as the first agreement requiring actual disarmament to be agreed upon at the international level.

The Convention was the subject of two review conferences, in 1980 and 1986. The Second Review Conference, in September 1986, stressed its determination to rule out any possibility of biological agents being used in weapons and repeated its commitment to reach agreement on a ban on chemical weapons. A final declaration was unanimously adopted which required the signatories to start work on measures to prevent or reduce any "ambiguities, doubts or suspicions" concerning bacteriological activities and to improve international co-operation on the peaceful uses of microbiology. Among the measures proposed were the exchange of information concerning research facilities, biological products and the occurrence of rare diseases. A new arrangement allows any state to call for a meeting of