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# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Statement by Mr. Arsène Després,  
Head of the Canadian Delegation  
to the Second Review Conference  
of the Convention on the Prohibition  
of the Development, Production  
and Stockpiling of Bacteriological  
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons  
and on their Destruction

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

September 9, 1986

Canada

Mr. President,

The Canadian Delegation welcomes the opportunity to participate in this Second Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. As has frequently been observed, this Convention has a quality of uniqueness in being the first multilateral agreement concluded with the purpose of effectively eliminating permanently from the earth an entire category of weapons. The strict adherence of all parties to all the terms and obligations of the Convention is thus a matter of similar importance. So, too, is the need for universality of adherence to the Convention and the norms which it embodies.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that when the Convention was concluded, as reflected in its preamble and in Article IX, it was seen as an important step toward the effective prohibition of chemical weapons. The negotiations to that end in the recently completed session of the Conference on Disarmament give cause for cautious hope that the prospects for the attainment of this objective have improved. It would be appropriate for the Conference to urge that the serious pursuit of those negotiations be intensified. Just

as important, we must take care to conduct ourselves in this Conference in ways that are supportive of and in no way undermine or prejudice that negotiating effort.

As seen by the Canadian delegation, our task here will be twofold: to examine dispassionately the operation of the Convention since its entering into force; and to consider ways in which the effectiveness of its application might be strengthened so as to increase the level of assurance that all parties are adhering rigorously to their obligations.

Mr. President, it is a truism that all areas of arms control and disarmament involve a kind of race between the ceaseless advances of science and technology and the ability of policymakers and lawmakers to ensure that such advances are used to strengthen rather than to undermine international peace and security. In the field of biotechnology, this tension between scientific and technical advance -- which can be of inestimable value for enhancing the health, comfort and security of peoples everywhere -- and the potential for misuse for non-peaceful purposes, is especially acute. Since the time when the Convention entered into force, even since the First Review Conference, there have been major advances in numerous aspects of biotechnology. The material put before us by the Depository Governments makes this

clear. Much of this technological progress, even when it results from perfectly legitimate, peaceful research programmes could, with distressingly little effort, be redirected toward illegitimate purposes of the kind prohibited by the Convention that we are reviewing. Indeed, such is the state of biotechnology that there is room for legitimate doubt that the Convention to which we are all parties can ever be verifiable to the standards of adequacy which many of us would normally require to be incorporated into any significant arms control and disarmament agreement.

There is another regrettable fact that must be taken into account during the course of our deliberations here. In contrast to the situation that prevailed at the time when the First Review Conference convened, there have in the intervening period been several allegations of serious breaches of the Convention. This is cause for major concern. Canada accepts that these allegations have not been made frivolously nor in the absence of disturbing evidence. The seriousness of the Canadian Government's concerns about these allegations is attested by our having conducted several investigations relating to allegations of toxin weapons use in Southeast Asia. These investigations have formed the basis of three separate submissions to the United Nations Secretary General. These investigations do not, in themselves, definitively confirm the use of toxin weapons in that

region. However, neither do they refute the validity of the allegations nor in any way allay our sense of concern. On the basis of Canadian investigations, anomalous epidemiological phenomena in Southeast Asia in the early 1980's remain inadequately explained. The most salient point which Canada's investigative effort in that region underlines is the absolute necessity of full, prompt, unqualified co-operation on the part of all directly concerned parties if uncertainties about compliance are to be satisfactorily received. In the case of our own investigative activities, as in the case of a team of experts sent to the area by the UN Secretary General in 1981, such co-operation was not forthcoming. We note that uncertainties relating to other alleged breaches of the Convention have similarly not been resolved. This is an unsatisfactory and unacceptable situation.

In the face of this situation, involving widespread doubts about the possibility of ever being able to devise adequate and practicable verification provisions, as well as persisting unresolved uncertainties relating to allegations of non-compliance, it would be all too easy to lapse into a despairing, do-nothing attitude. However, such a defeatist approach would only undermine the established norm against biological weapons. This Convention, which remains a legally binding instrument for all States Parties, is the strongest embodiment of that norm. The Canadian Government considers

that it should be the task of this Conference to seek to strengthen the application of the Convention in realistic and operationally practicable ways. We hope this Conference will be able to reach agreement on a selection of measures to this end, which could be set out in politically binding form in the Final Document of this Conference, to be adopted by consensus. In particular, Canada would urge the desirability of building on the achievement of the First Review Conference by reiterating the right under Article V of any State Party to request the convening of a consultative meeting open to all States Parties at the expert level, and by stating the corresponding obligation of all directly concerned States Parties to respond positively to such a request through participation in the consultative meeting and by extending full co-operation in resolving any compliance-related questions. The Canadian Delegation is also ready to give constructive and positive consideration to other proposed measures which could strengthen confidence that the norm against biological weapons is being respected and raise the level of assurance that the legal obligations embodied in the Convention are in reality being adhered to by all States Parties.

In conclusion, Mr. President, the Canadian Delegation reaffirms before this body that Canada has never possessed biological weapons and continues in every respect to be in full compliance with

all its obligations under the Convention. In the hope that it might encourage greater "forthcomingness" on the part of all States Parties with regard to the freer exchange of information concerning biotechnology research and development in our respective countries, the Canadian Delegation is filing with the Conference Secretariat, with the request that it become an official Conference document, a paper setting out the general nature and magnitude of biotechnology activities in Canada and the extent of governmental involvement therein.