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### **Statement by the Friends World Committee for Consultation To the Sixth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention**

**21 November 2006**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

The Friends World Committee for Consultation is grateful for this opportunity to join with other non-governmental organizations and research institutions in addressing delegates to the Sixth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. This recognition of the contribution which civil society bodies can and do make to the cause of multilateral disarmament is very important.

This Convention is of central importance--for its own sake, and for its historic significance as an early building-block in the construction of a multilateral treaty system of global and comprehensive disarmament.

The Convention embodies three critical elements: an affirmation, a commitment to action, and a process of review.

#### AFFIRMATION

Its affirmation is that human knowledge of microbiology is a precious resource, which shall only ever be applied to the prevention of disease and other peaceful purposes, and never in any circumstances to armed conflict or other hostile purposes.

#### COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Its commitment to action requires several things of its States Parties to make the Convention work as intended. Specifically, we would like to highlight actions required under Articles IV, V and X, which are of particular relevance in your forthcoming deliberations.

- Under Article IV, the Convention requires the translation of all the Article I prohibitions into national legislation, with appropriate penalties and effective implementation so that those legal prohibitions do not exist on paper only but are actively applied so as to prevent anyone, anywhere, breaching the Convention. It requires equal enforcement on 'non-state actors' and on individuals with governmental affiliations. And it requires international cooperation and criminalisation to block any loopholes or gaps between national jurisdictions.

- Under Article V it is imperative to find better ways to handle questions that may arise in the life of the Convention, such as those regarding compliance, so that suspicions can be allayed and doubts resolved. There can hardly be a graver accusation than that of preparing to wage biological warfare, through the covert development of offensive programmes. At present such accusations are all too likely to remain unresolved, largely because the means to establish certainty are lacking. This deficiency tends to erode the credibility of the Convention. We hope you will embark on a vigorous search for remedies. These might include: reviewing and renewing confidence-building measures which focus clearly on providing information *as* it is needed to generate confidence *where* it is needed; devising stronger procedures for Consultative Meetings dealing with questions of compliance on which States Parties are already required under Article V to consult and cooperate; and, when political conditions allow, developing measures for the verification of compliance.

- Under Article X action is needed to promote international cooperation for the prevention of disease and other peaceful applications of microbiology. If only States Parties could identify practical and specific ways forward on this first half of Article X, there would be less frustration over this seemingly endless quest. There might also be less tension then between different groups of States Parties over the second half of Article X, about not hampering economic or technological development, and how this provision can be applied safely and consistently with Article III.

## PROCESS OF REVIEW

Mr. President

We also attach great importance to a third critical element of the Convention: the process of review. The Friends World Committee for Consultation, through the work of its Quaker United Nations Office, has followed the process of review with close attention throughout the life of the Convention. In our view, one of the most valuable aspects of the review process has been its cumulative nature, with each Review Conference up to 1996 building on the foundations laid by the one before.

But the review process will prosper only if this Sixth Review Conference succeeds in agreeing upon a Final Declaration. We encourage all delegations to use the resources already on offer, including detailed textual analyses and recommendations, to draw out the implications of each Article and express them in extended understandings and commitments to action, building on the past but looking to the future.

More specifically, we seek a Final Declaration which brings together and brings up to date, Article by Article, the most relevant understandings and commitments recorded by the first four Review Conferences with the principal findings of the Meetings of States Parties mandated by the Fifth Review Conference. Both streams of text (1980 – 1996 and 2003 – 2005) are important and flow down to this Conference. From these should flow a Final Declaration, expressing in a single integrated text the agreed understanding of each Article and its implications for action. Such a Final Declaration will set the Convention confidently on the next stage in its life.

Without a Final Declaration the outcome of this Review Conference would be seriously deficient and the review process would be left drifting. With a Final Declaration, one which skillfully combines reaffirmation of past commitments and agreements with contemporary understandings to take them forward, the review process will be successfully revived and the Convention will benefit.

## PERMANENCE

Mr. President

It is vital that this Review Conference act in such a manner as to reinforce the authority and credibility of the Convention as a permanent feature on the international scene.

We have already indicated some of the directions in which we hope the Conference will take its review in respect of Articles IV, V and X, to help reinforce the durability of the Convention.

In the same vein, we also favour the adoption of realistic timelines or targets for making progress towards universality, and action plans for national implementation. And we would remind the Conference that two long-standing commitments, agreed by consensus in 1980 and 1996 respectively, and recorded in the Article VIII section of the Final Declarations of those years, remain to be fulfilled by a significant number of States Parties. These are: adherence to the Geneva Protocol of 1925, and withdrawal of reservations to that Protocol. The Conference needs a mechanism to follow up progress on these commitments until the necessary treaty actions are complete.

Additionally, we would encourage the States Parties to expand the Article XII section of the Final Declaration with new paragraphs expressly designed to address the institutional deficit and bridge the interval between the Sixth and Seventh Review Conferences. To do this, we hope the States Parties will mandate interim strengthening structures in support of the Convention, in particular mandating the Annual Meeting. Building on the best practice established since 2003 in the Meetings of States Parties, we see the Annual Meeting as a natural evolution out of those Meetings of States Parties. So the Annual Meeting should give particular attention, each year between 2007 and 2010, to a selected theme or aspect of the Convention; but it should also pursue a continuing agenda and follow up the priorities, commitments and action plans agreed at this Conference. To do this properly, the Annual Meeting will need a standing secretariat or implementation unit, and sources of expert advice such as a scientific advisory panel, in support of the Convention and in the service of the States Parties collectively.

The Convention embodies a collective affirmation and a collective commitment to action. Therefore, we think it only logical that its States Parties should take collective measures to secure its health and to promote its permanence. We look forward to a Final Declaration which emphasises the permanent duration of the Convention and starts to equip it with structures to match. This does not mean amending the Convention. It does mean, however, the channeling of the efforts of the States Parties systematically and continuously into making the Convention work—as it stands and as this Conference declares it to be understood.

## DISARMAMENT

Mr. President

We noted at the start of this statement the historic significance of the Convention as an early building block in a multilateral treaty system of global and comprehensive disarmament. Quakers pursue disarmament not out of fear but out of hope; and our hope for a better world includes the hope for a greatly strengthened system of disarmament treaties and processes. There is a long way to

go. Progress is slow, too slow as a match for the kinds of security threats to the peoples of the world which can be seen from growing levels and quality of weapons hardware. Yet the enterprise must continue.

This Convention remains fundamental in the construction of a system of global and comprehensive disarmament for the sake of humankind. It deserves all possible nurture and reinforcement. We are therefore heartened by the constructive approach you have taken in the preparation for this meeting, Mr. President, and by the positive and determined atmosphere which seems to prevail at the start of this Sixth Review Conference.

May we assure you all of our continued support as you combine your efforts for a successful outcome to this Review Conference and a Final Declaration which will sustain and steer the Convention through the next five years of its life.

Thank you.

David Atwood  
Director  
Quaker United Nations Office

*The FWCC wishes to thank Nicholas Sims, London School of Economics, for his important assistance in the preparation of this statement.*