

## Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Speech

Distinguished parliamentarians, distinguished diplomatic colleagues, honourable guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to speak with you today and I thank you for the invitation. I must confess, however, that it has been some considerable time since I had any dealings with the disarmament and non-proliferation world so I hope that I can do this presentation justice.

1972 was a long time ago. I was still wearing shorts at school. I realise too that many of you were not even born that far back – thank you. You make me feel old !

But it was in April 1972 that the Biological Weapons Convention – or the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (as we like to call it BTWC for short), was first opened for signature and it then entered into force in 1975. Significantly, the BTWC was the first disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The treaty came into force on 26 March 1975 and this year has celebrated 40 years of existence.

Our collective BTWC objectives have not changed since that first signature. Namely, the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. Our values have remained the same, but sadly the world has not.

Recent events have shown that biological risks, whether they are naturally occurring, deliberate or accidental, are hard to predict and they do not respect borders. They affect the International Community and may arise anywhere in the world, posing incredible challenges. By way of an easy reminder, just think back to the most recent Ebola crisis. They require efficient cross-border and multisectoral collaboration and well-established channels of communication. They also require prevention, detection, preparedness, response and biosecurity measures that benefit all countries. The easiest way to achieve this is through collaboration.

Strength therefore lies in unity. The BTWC now has 173 Member States. As a representative of one of the Convention's three depositaries, I warmly offer my congratulations to Andorra, Burma and Mauritania who I believe were the latest to accede, helping the Convention step closer to its goal of a universal membership.

Universality is an important priority for the UK particularly as the UK is a Depositary State for the Convention. The UK has a keen sense of responsibility for this Convention as the original proposal for a separate ban on biological weapons was made by the United Kingdom back in 1968. We have always sought to make the Convention as effective as possible and have been consistent supporters of the efforts to that end ever since the First Review Conference in 1980.

Universality is also important because a treaty or convention which has universal membership is obviously stronger than one which doesn't. Progress with universalisation enhances the legitimacy of the BTWC and we (the UK) are keen to bolster the numbers of States Party to the Convention ahead of the next Review Conference in November 2016.

But some may ask why should we even bother?

The risk of an accidental or natural spread of dangerous pathogens is rising because of globalisation and increasing international travel and trade, bringing with them increased risks to public, animal and plant health and food security. But it is not just about Ebola. It is also much more than research into brucellosis and malaria for example; two important research areas funded by the UK or G7 Global Partnership projects cooperating on peaceful research for infectious disease prevention.

Biological agents and toxins are widely used for peaceful purposes and it is important to remind ourselves of the Convention's relevance in the field of peaceful bacteriological activities and co-operation (e.g. scientific research and vaccines that are permitted under the Convention). But given the inherent characteristics, some biological agents and toxins can also be misused for hostile purposes.

Scientific progress and the risk of access to pathogens and toxins held for legitimate purposes, bring in their wake a risk that terrorists may seek to acquire dangerous biological materials. Even when such biological agents and

toxins do not exist in nature on the territory of a BTWC State Party, it could still be confronted by biological weapon threats. In the absence of effective national legislation or control that prohibits biological weapons and penalizes offences, non-state actors could use the territory of such a State Party as a safe haven to pursue their efforts in acquiring biological and toxin agents for hostile purposes. By joining the Convention, States Parties commit to the international effort to tackle these threats but also benefit from greater member cooperation. Strength lies in unity.

UK priorities for the Convention include building capacity among States Parties in the event of a biological attack, improving national implementation and compliance and ensuring that it remains effective despite the rapid progress of science and technology. Strength lies in unity.

This year the UK has worked in close collaboration with Germany (who held G7 Presidency) to lobby those countries who remain outside of the Convention. These include the nine states that have signed but not ratified the BTWC and the fourteen states that have neither signed nor acceded to the BTWC. Only when the Convention is universal, will all States Parties reap its full benefits. Strength lies in unity.

We can lead by example. Promoting the universality of the Convention reflects our common interests. Joining the Convention should become more attractive to those who remain outside it. We should encourage these countries to focus on the pragmatic and achievable and avoid fighting old battles. There is much common understanding between us and we ultimately want the same thing. Opportunities lie ahead. We should strive to be bold and welcome the remaining countries into the convention.

For as we know, Strength lies in unity.

Thank you.