

Speech - Lic. Ronny Monge Salas

Historical background:

- Peaceful coexistence, dignified and equal treatment, and the ideal of justice, are the pillars upon which humanitarian law was built, as it came to be during the Geneva conventions at the end of the 19th century.
- The use of toxins or pathogenic agents has been deemed an unfair practice by many cultures over the course of history. As a consequence it has been banned in various international treaties, in particular the Hague Convention (1907).
- After the Second World War the United Nations appealed for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.
- Around the same time, the 1st of December 1948, my country recently had concluded its last episode of domestic war, and declared peace to the world by proclaiming the abolition of its army, entrusting its confidence and security to the institutions created by international law.
- 1969 UN report: the effects of certain chemical and biological weapons cannot be limited in space nor time, and could have serious irreversible consequences for humanity and nature.
- 1970 WHO report: these weapons are a special threat to civilians. Collateral damage; the effects are subject to a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability
- 1972: BWC opened for signature. It is a relatively short document, consisting of only 15 items, and is not without ambiguities, but it undoubtedly represents a significant advance in comparison with the previous status quo.
- December 17, 1973: Costa Rica ratified the BWC.
- March 26, 1975: BWC entered into force with 22 ratifications, including those of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, who were appointed as trustees.
- At present, 171 States have acceded to the Convention, including all the permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Challenges:

- In the Convention, the States Parties undertake to cooperate in the further development and better application of scientific discoveries in the field of biology, with regard to the prevention of diseases or other peaceful purposes (Article X). However, since the Convention is essentially a disarmament treaty, it is unlikely to serve as an effective instrument for such cooperation.
- Participants in the latest Review Conference of the BWC recognized the existence of a widening gap between developing and developed countries in the fields of biotechnology, genetic engineering, microbiology, and other related areas.

Working document by Latin American group:

- In order to promote scientific cooperation, collaboration and technology transfer, there have been regularly held conferences to review compliance and negotiate additional measures. In this context, a group of countries composed of Costa Rica, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay presented a working document with important initiatives to advance the universality of the BWC, inviting states to consider the following recommendations:
 - Full implementation of agreements reached during review conferences of the BWC.
 - Ensure scientific cooperation and technology transfer in peaceful activities, such as those related to public health and agriculture.
 - Develop effective coordination mechanisms between the specialized agencies of the United Nations and international and regional organizations, in order to facilitate scientific cooperation and technology transfer.
 - Annual reports on actions taken in the field of scientific cooperation and technology transfer.
 - Reiterate the request of the Secretary General of the UN to gather and report to the State Parties regarding the implementation of Article X of the BWC, as well as in relation to decisions that were taken during the Review Conference.
 - The adoption of measures to create networks with scientific communities and the academic sector regarding the peaceful use of biotechnology, genetic engineering, microbiology and other areas relevant to the BWC.
 - Supporting the establishment of procedures to provide assistance to State Parties as required under Article VII of the BWC.
 - Review of the procedures for consultation and cooperation in accordance with Article V of the BWC.
 - Creating a database that contains information on international cooperation and technology transfer.

More challenges:

- Article III: it is also prohibited to assist, encourage or induce the acquisition of banned weapons.
- These clauses (Article II & III) seem incompatible with the commitment of State Parties to participate in the “fullest possible exchange” of biological agents, toxins and the equipment necessary for the processing, use or production of such agents for peaceful purposes (Article X), since these materials, technologies and the relevant expertise are likely to have a dual purpose, and, therefore, offer ample opportunities for military application.
- The lack of a definition of the terms “weapons, equipment or vectors” has been controversial. It would not be wise to grant States the right to unilaterally decide for themselves what elements are included in these definitions.
- The double standards upheld by some countries, by ratifying international treaties while secretly developing their arsenals, represent a real danger, illustrated by the cases of the

former Soviet Union and Iraq. For this reason the international community should have effective surveillance measures at its disposal.

Conclusion:

- I take this opportunity to remind you that Costa Rica made a proposal for an arms trade treaty which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in April 2012 with 153 votes in favor and urge those present that their countries should ratify this agreement to permit it to enter into force.
- Quote by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez.
- At a time when the ethics of the economic system have become subject to discussion worldwide, and where we cannot deny that the industry of war is business for many nations, Dr. Oscar Arias Sanchez reminds us that "...and in the end it depends on the values of each government. Up to this day they have put profits over principles. The day may come when principles are put above the profits of arms manufacturers..."
- Conclude by recalling some words of François Guizot, which gives us an idea of the responsibility that is upon us: "the world belongs to the optimists, the pessimists are just spectators", and we already have too many spectators. What we need are men and women that are determined to change current realities. Today we need to work together and share our hope.