

Statement by Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament at the Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, Geneva, December 1, 2008

Mr Chairman,

The Indian delegation would like to convey its congratulations to you on your assumption of the Chairmanship of this meeting. We would like to convey our deep appreciation for all your efforts and that of the Implementation Support Unit for the excellent ground work undertaken during the Meeting of Experts in August and the subsequent inter-sessional consultations undertaken by you. I would like to assure you of our full support and cooperation for the success of our common endeavours.

India associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Cuba on behalf of the Non Aligned Movement.

Mr Chairman,

The Biological Weapons Convention was the first disarmament treaty that eliminated an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. India attaches the highest priority towards the further strengthening of the BWC. We believe that only a multilaterally agreed mechanism for verification of compliance can provide the assurance of observance of compliance obligations by the States Parties and can act as a deterrence against non-compliance. We also believe that the decision regarding strengthening of the BWC should be taken by the Review Conference based on the principle of consensus.

Mr Chairman,

Though bio-safety and bio-security are not concepts that have been defined by the Convention, a discussion amongst the States Parties can serve to increase common understanding on ways to strengthening implementation of the Convention. We are also aware that these two concepts, mutually related and reinforcing have also been addressed in other international fora. We believe that we should focus our deliberations on exchange of ideas and experiences to see whether best practices can be evolved to be implemented by national authorities which should continue to bear the main responsibility for the implementation of the Convention in accordance with relevant national laws, regulations and policies.

In recent years, India has made considerable strides in the advancement of biological sciences, life sciences and biotechnology which are critical to meet its developmental priorities. Global advances in biotechnology genetic engineering and life sciences have benefited from the participation and contribution of the Indian scientific community and industry.

Recent advances in biotechnology, genetic engineering and life sciences and their dual use nature pose particular danger of proliferation and the hostile use of biological weapons. The possibility of non-state actors, including terrorists acquiring such toxins or agents have added a new dimension to this danger. We believe that international cooperative efforts are an important component in addressing these challenges. India's resolution at the UN General Assembly "Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction" has been adopted by consensus reflecting the common concern and determination of the international community on this issue.

India has put together a broad-based legislative framework to prevent the misuse of macro-organisms and to regulate biomedical research. The Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Delivery System Act of 2005, defines biological weapons in the same manner as in the Biological Weapons Convention. This Act prohibits unlawful acquisition, possession, storage, handling, development or transport of biological weapons or its means of delivery. The Foreign Trade Development Regulation Act of 1992 regulates import and export of macro-organisms and toxins and covers plant pathogens and genetically modified organisms. Other legislative measures which are of relevance include the Disaster Management Act of 2005, the Environment Protection Act of 1986, the Drugs and Cosmetics Rule (8th Amendment of 1988), the National Seeds Policy of 2002, the Biological Diversity Act of 2002 and Biological Diversity Rules of 2004. India is a signatory to the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety.

The Indian Government has also ensured that research in bio-science and bio-technology are guided by a system of monitoring and review of the highest standards. Various Ministries have been allotted specific mandates and responsibilities covering administrative oversight for biotechnology, dealing with biological disasters, bio-terrorism and epidemics and action to be taken with regard to biological disasters related to animals, livestock, fisheries and related groups. The National Disaster Management Authority has issued specific guidelines for biological disasters, including on bio-safety and bio-security. The Department of Biotechnology has constituted several inter-ministerial committees to provide comprehensive coverage of entire gamut of bio-safety issues. Ongoing measures are also underway for raising training and educational awareness among all relevant actors – covering Government, Industry and the Scientific Community.

Mr Chairman,

We have taken note of your synthesis paper reflecting a broad range of issues covered during the Meeting of Experts. We would like to stress that the primary responsibility for implementing the Convention rests with national authorities. We are open to exploring common international standards to facilitate cooperation and coordination among States Parties. Such standards should be practical and implementable by national authorities, with assistance, upon request, from States in a position to provide such assistance. It is also important to ensure that such standards facilitate the strengthening of Article 10 of the Convention, to which India attaches the highest priority. We believe that evolving Code of Conduct cannot be a substitute for a legally binding measures to ensure the strict implementation and compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, we would like to assure you of the full support of our delegation to ensure the success of this meeting.