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Statement to the 6th Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction

20 November 2006

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Representatives. It is an honour to be invited to make a statement to the meeting of the 6th Review Conference of the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention (BTCW). The Institute for Security Studies is an African policy research organisation working on peace and security issues and has offices in South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia.

Africa, perhaps more than any other continent, experiences daily the devastating effect of natural and deliberate disease, particularly upon vulnerable populations in states where health care facilities are seldom equipped to deal effectively and efficiently with disease outbreaks. We, therefore have a direct interest in a positive outcome of this and future meetings of states parties to the BTWC.

Mr Chairman, the 5th Review Conference of the Convention agreed on an annual programme of work to "discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action" on five subjects of relevance to the strengthening of the convention. It has been widely accepted that the inter-sessional programme of work succeeded in ensuring that States Parties continued to discuss issues of relevance to strengthening the Convention despite the set back that occurred in 2001.

Mr Chairman, the Institute is concerned by the massive increase in secret biodefence activities of certain States Parties over the past five years. The Institute believes that a lack of transparency in biodefence activities has the potential of increasing suspicion that may in turn



result in the proliferation of biological and toxin weapons. Reasonable transparency with regard to biodefence activities is essential to preventing proliferation.

Mr Chairman, we hope that the 6th Review Conference will again adopt a three-year inter-sessional programme of work with the emphasis on promoting effective action on the following issues:

1. Confidence Building Measures

We are pleased to note that several States Parties have elected to make their annual CBM submissions available on-line through the Internet. We hope that in time all States Parties will adopt this practice. However, we believe that it is important for States Parties to reassess the relevance and applicability of the CBM forms with a view to revising these forms as necessary. The utility of CBM declarations is currently limited by the fact that they are not systematically translated into all UN languages, nor are they subject to any analysis. We hope that States Parties may address these issues in any discussions that may take place about CBMs.

2. Peaceful technology transfers and enhancing national health care systems to respond to disease outbreaks

The Institute believes that efforts to develop cures for, and vaccines to prevent, diseases that are endemic to our continent, should, in the spirit of Article X be used to the benefit of all. Particularly when these have been developed through state-funded biodefence programmes. Few national health care systems in Africa are capable of responding efficiently and effectively to large-scale disease outbreaks, let alone conduct sufficient disease surveillance. These are issues that require the attention of States Parties and consideration must be given to the establishment of a continental or regional pool of vaccines for use in Africa.

3. Universalisation

We note that eleven of the twenty-four states that have not yet signed the Convention, and nine of the sixteen who have signed but not ratified, are African. We believe that universalisation is essential to strengthening the convention, but it is important to recognize that any discussion about universalisation needs to address issues of assistance to states that may require it. This is also an issue that requires the attention of States Parties. Progress will require a dedicated effort.

This 6th Review Conference provides an important opportunity to strengthen the Convention, it is an opportunity that should not be missed. The requirements for capacity building in Africa should be evident from the three areas that we have highlighted above. All require urgent attention.

