First Committee
22 October 2010

Thematic discussion on other weapons of mass destruction

Statement by Senator Kerry O’Brien
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(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

The proliferation of chemical and biological weapons is a potentially serious threat to global and regional security.

Australia has long been at the forefront of efforts to counter this threat – a threat which demands undiminished commitment to strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention.

Mr Chairman

The CWC is a cornerstone of the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

Australia is encouraged by continuing progress in the destruction of chemical weapons. We urge the remaining CW Possessor States to make every effort to meet their extended deadlines for destruction.

Full and effective implementation of the CWC is essential to ensure that its non-proliferation goals are met. We strongly encourage all States Parties that have not fully
implemented their Article VII obligations to continue their efforts to establish a National Authority, as well as legislative and administrative measures to implement the CWC.

These legislative and administrative measures include the criminalisation of the prohibitions contained within the CWC. Such measures also underpin States Parties abilities to submit accurate and complete Article VI declarations to the OPCW and enable a fairer distribution of inspection-load among member countries with declarable chemical activities.

Australia considers it vital that all CWC member states look to the future to ensure that the CWC adapts to developments in science and technology. We must guarantee that the verification regime remains strong and effective.

Mr Chairman

The Biological Weapons Convention is strengthening global defences against biological weapons and bioterrorism.

Since the 6th Review Conference in 2006, we have witnessed re-energised and practical efforts within the BWC – including through valuable intersessional meetings and the accomplishments of the Implementation Support Unit.

The 7th Review Conference in 2011 is now rapidly approaching.

As coordinator of the BWC Western Group and member of the JACKSNNZ group, Australia looks forward to working with all states parties to ensure that the Review Conference agrees to outcomes which are practical and which foster further transparency and confidence, and further strengthen the BWC as our collective defence against the threat of biological weapons.

Australia is committed to realising universal adherence to and full implementation of the BWC in the Asia-Pacific, and has been actively involved in the conduct of regional workshops on BWC implementation and related biosecurity issues since 2005.

For example, last month, the Philippines, the United States and Australia co-chaired an ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Biorisk Management and Strengthening Biosecurity in Manila.

The workshop focused on the implementation of best practice biorisk management for the prevention of accidental release or intentional misuse of human and animal pathogens.
This workshop built on the first ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Biological Threat Reduction, held in 2009, which covered the basic concepts of biosecurity and biosafety in preventing bioterrorism.

This will be a significant contribution to the biosecurity core area of the counter-terrorism work plan of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

And Australia continues to urge that the seven Pacific states yet to join the BWC do so.

It is very important that states join the BWC. Adherence to and implementation of the BWC is an important preventative tool against the safe havens sought by potential perpetrators of bioterrorism.

Mr Chairman

In 1985, Australia convened the first meeting of 15 states in Brussels in response to Iraq’s use of chemical weapons in its war with Iran.

The response of these 15 states – harmonised national export controls – led to the birth of the Australia Group.

The Australia Group has grown into a 40-member strong cooperative and voluntary body working to counter the spread of technologies and materials that could assist states of concern and terrorist groups in obtaining or developing chemical and biological weapons.

At its most recent plenary meeting held in Paris in June 2010, the Australia Group reiterated its view that preventing unauthorised transfers of intangible technology remained a priority area in the defence against the proliferation of all forms of weapons of mass destruction.

As a contribution to this goal, the Australia Group agreed to finalise a new outreach publication to assist states in dealing with intangible transfers of technology.

The publication has been made possible through the generous support of the Republic of Korea and will be available to both Australia Group participants and non-participants, including on-line.

Australia sees effective export controls on CBW-related dual-use materials, equipment and technology as an important means to fulfil obligations under the CWC, BWC and UN Security Council Resolution 1540.
Mr Chairman,

Black market activity, including illicit brokering and intermediation services, can circumvent the restrictions set out in the CWC, BWC and export control regimes such as the Australia Group.

Australia welcomes efforts to strengthen international efforts to curb the proliferation risk posed by illicit brokering activities, including of materials, equipment and technology that could contribute to the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons.

With this continuing threat in mind, Australia is supporting the Republic of Korea in its leadership of the resolution on preventing and combating illicit brokering activities during this First Committee. We encourage the strongest support and sponsorship of this resolution.

Australia's continued determination to combat illicit brokering of weapons of mass destruction is undiminished.

And we welcome the progress being achieved in this forum and the practical progress achieved in advancing international cooperation on export controls on dual use materials.

Mr Chairman,

Australia continues to see an essential role for both the CWC and the BWC in the global security architecture, as tools for curbing the threat of chemical and bio-terrorism.

Importantly, both Conventions are also buttressing our efforts to fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and its successor resolutions.

We will continue in our efforts to support, strengthen and advance these key Conventions.

I thank you.