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NEWS RELEASE

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## Avoiding Bioterrorism Starts with US

(Austin and Hamburg, 19 September 2001) - The United States decision to respond to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington with military force could destabilize controls on biological weapons and trigger chemical and biological war. To prevent a slide down this dangerous and slippery slope, the United States' four recent key mistakes in biological weapons control must be corrected. Failure to take these steps may worsen conditions conducive to terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction.

Equally important, the US must not succumb to the temptation to use less lethal chemical and biological weapons - such as caltatives and other riot control agents - in the war it has declared on terrorism. Please see the News Release "The Destabilizing Danger of "Non-Lethal" Chemical and Biological Weapons in the War on Terrorism", also issued today, for more information on this threat.

### Correcting Critical Policy Mistakes

As fear of a terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction skyrockets, the US must analyze and correct its policies that contribute to biological weapons instability. There are four recent critical missteps:

- First, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is conducting a secret program of biodefense research that, in the opinion of many experts, violates the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. This work, revealed in the New York Times, involves testing mock biological bombs and construction of a bioweapons production facility in Nevada. If any other country conducted this research, it would have drawn the US's harshest denunciations and, quite possibly, military attack. The longer the United States insists on this biological weapons research double standard, the more determined its enemies will be, and the greater the risk to its own and allies' citizens.
- Second, the United States failed to disclose the CIA's research in annual declarations of biodefense activities to the Bioweapons Convention, deliberately evading a UN mechanism to enhance transparency and trust between nations. The significance of this US failure is difficult to overstate. Secret US biological weapons research has drawn suspicion from the US allies and undermined faith in voluntary confidence building measures. To US enemies, the CIA's work is nothing short of a biological weapons threat. Failing corrective action, pious declarations about the danger of bioweapons will ring hollow and be understood by US enemies as lies - or even threats.
- Third, while it may shock many Americans, it is no secret to arms control experts that the United States has menaced Afghanistan (and Colombia, home to three groups on the US State Department's terrorist list) with the threat of a biological attack since at least 1998. This threat is through plans to use the fungus *Pleospora papaveracea*, a biological weapon, to forcibly eradicate opium poppy crops. Transcripts of Kabul Radio clearly indicate that the Taliban is aware of the plan and opposes it. Through the United Nations Drug Control Program, the US has attempted to veil the fungus in legality by obtaining the approval of the Afghan government in exile, which has no *de facto* power. The Taliban is thought to willingly harbor terrorists who use weapons of mass destruction. The US and its allies are foolish, hypocritical, and courting disaster to continue to threaten such a state with a biological weapons attack.
- Fourth, in July, the United States trashed six years of negotiations to develop a Protocol for international verification of the Bioweapons Convention. Not only did it anger the world by being uncooperative, the US even said it would block other nations' attempts to proceed with new controls on biological weapons. Close

US allies were publicly appalled; but few publicly suggested it was because the US itself intended to violate the treaty. With the *New York Times* revelation and the new, dangerous atmosphere following the terrorist attacks, the size and ramifications of the USA's terrible miscalculation are now fully apparent.

At a minimum, the US needs to take the following actions:

- 1) The CIA's research program must be immediately and entirely terminated. Because of frail US credibility on this issue, this decision must be made and explained in clear detail by a high-ranking US official and;
- 2) In light of incontrovertible evidence that it has not complied with confidence building measures, the US has no peaceful alternative but to endorse a United Nations system of bioweapons verification requiring broad declarations and mandatory, short-notice, and comprehensively-equipped UN inspections of commercial and military biotechnology facilities. Nothing less will restore faith in US compliance. Dubious arguments about shielding US facilities in deference to commercial interests are outmoded by recent events and no longer tenable. Lives cannot be put at risk in the interest biotechnology profits, even if the US Defense Secretary once headed Searle, the former pharmaceutical division of Monsanto;
- 3) The Drug War cannot be a pretext for undermining biological weapons controls and escalating the war on terrorism. The United States and the United Nations Drug Control Program must immediately and unequivocally renounce the development and use of biological agents in forced crop eradication. The US-supported research facility at the Institute for Genetics in Tashkent, Uzbekistan must be immediately locked and the key thrown away. Research efforts in the United States must be similarly halted. The government of the United Kingdom, which has provided lukewarm support for the research, should announce that in light of the current political situation it must withdraw its support in the interests of peace and security.
- 4) The United States must come back to the table at the Verification Protocol negotiations and signal its intention to cooperate. The US does not have the ability to inspect suspected biological weapons facilities worldwide. A UN system could possess this strength and obtain access and apply verification technology not possible for any state to use alone. US policymakers say they are developing new ideas for verification, which they – and other countries - should bring to the 5th Review Conference of the BTWC in November. But political reality dictates that the current negotiating text must be the starting point. The vast majority of countries have already agreed to a number of measures to improve verification. Scrapping existing work and developing a new text is an option unlikely to be possible for at least several years.