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NEWS RELEASE

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US Quiet as the World Backs the Bioweapons Protocol Delegates Await Possible Announcement on Wednesday

(Geneva and Austin, 23 July 2001) – Today's opening session of the negotiations to finalize the Verification Protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) closed without a US announcement that it is withdrawing from the effort.

US media widely reported a planned withdrawal on Saturday.

But the reprieve may only be temporary. The US delegation has privately indicated it wishes to speak up on Wednesday, after the arrival of a high-level UN troubleshooter sent from New York by Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Negotiations Chairman Tibor Toth told delegates it is "*time to deliver*". And the world did, with country after country taking the floor and announcing willingness to compromise and finalize a Protocol text before the BTWC's critical Fifth Review Conference, beginning in November.

South Africa told the meeting "*The time has come for all delegations to place their cards on the table.*" The US sat stoically silent as the world moved to work together in an impressive display of political will. A poignant moment came when Pakistan - in a display of international flair - drew from a Swedish proverb to make its point, asking: "*Those who want to sing always find a song. But does everybody want to sing?*"

Other countries threw icier jabs, suggesting that the US would like to kill the Protocol with silence. Said Iran, "*If we are faced with mysterious silence or one or more countries... that would prove a lack of interest for a timely conclusion of the Protocol.*"

While the US isn't the only country to have reservations about the Protocol, everyone else is willing to try to work the kinks out. The Sunshine Project and other non-profits have outlined a series of areas where the Protocol can and should be strengthened. These are discussed in the briefing paper *The Biological Weapons Convention and the Negotiations for a Verification Protocol*, available on our website.

In Geneva, the Sunshine Project's Jan van Aken said, "*The US has no chance of winning a blame game now. If there's a rogue state in Geneva, it's the USA.*" Added the Project's Susana Pimiento "*We hope the Americans silence isn't a cynical attempt to stall the negotiations so they go out with a whimper. With the impressive display of political will displayed here today, countries should get right down to business hammering out better deals on outstanding issues than they could with the US actively obstructing.*"