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NEWS RELEASE

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Bioweapons Negotiators Urged to Press Ahead Spies and High Explosives are No Recipe for Security

(Geneva - 25 July 2001) - "*Pressing ahead to forge a strong UN verification system is the world's best hope for biological weapons security.*" urged the Sunshine Project's Jan van Aken after today's US withdrawal from the negotiations on a Verification Protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). Today, the US stunned delegates and observers with the forcefulness of its outright rejection of a Protocol as a mechanism for strengthening the BTWC. Experts were shocked that the US government has repeated what it did on the Kyoto Protocol and declared a general rejection of the Verification system effort.

US Ambassador Don Mahley told BTWC delegates today that the US is "*unable to support the current text, even with changes.*" Instead of the Protocol in any form, Ambassador Mahley supported a range of measures for the US and few allies to police the rest of the world. Specifically Mahley suggesting the strengthening of the Australia Group, a small circle of mostly Northern countries that coordinate export controls of items that might be misused for offensive bioweapons programs.

Global Vigilante? If the Protocol is not completed, it will be up to individual countries to verify compliance with the Bioweapons Convention, if at all. US policymakers have endorsed the unilateral route, with token cooperation of a few close allies – if they are willing - and intelligence instead the draft UN system. A senior State Department testified to the US Congress this month that "*National intelligence is essential to detect B[T]WC cheating. U.S. efforts to strengthen the verifiability of the Biological Weapons Convention should always proceed from that fundamental reality.*"

Flawed Doctrine The Sunshine Project calls the US position the Wing and a Prayer Doctrine. By focusing on spying, the US is failing to take into account other fundamental realities, including the need for cooperation and its own fallibility, the latter demonstrated by the tragedies in Khartoum and at the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Edward Hammond explains: "The Wing and a Prayer Doctrine is a dangerous substitute for UN verification. The wings are those of cruise missiles streaking toward a suspected bioweapons facility. The prayers are for US intelligence to be right. The consequences are fatal, potentially including the death of innocent people in the event of error, and a further destabilizing breakdown of international cooperation to avert biological warfare. It is a flawed doctrine that proposes eliminating single threats while creating many more."

Silver Lining Six years of negotiations have gone into the draft Protocol. The new US policy presents challenges. US military and biotechnology power mean its will now be more difficult to develop an effective international system to prevent biological weapons. Negotiators, however, should redouble their efforts and start the process to draw the US back in.

The bad news has a potential silver lining if the world can muster political will. "*While eventual US ratification is highly desirable, the USA's self-imposed exile opens possibilities of strengthening the Protocol in deficient areas, where the US was obstructive, such as declarations, visits, and export controls,*" says van Aken. "*As is often the case in UN negotiations, the US may be talked into joining later.*" says Sunshine Project lawyer Susana Pimiento, "*Americans have a reputation for punctuality; but their government does not.*"

Dubious Defense The US government and a small number of conservative US think tanks argue that because there is no guarantee of catching every illicit program, the draft Protocol should be thrown out. Experts disagree, pointing out that deterrence and not perfection has always been the goal. There is broad agreement that bioweapons verification is a difficult job that will have to be learned. "*The US conveniently forgets that it was a major force creating problems in the draft text that it now calls unfixable.*" says van Aken. "*For example, the US now argues that the inspections aren't strong enough. But it was the Americans themselves who reduced the number and thoroughness of 'transparency visit' inspections*"

For a detailed but concise discussion of outstanding issues in the Protocol text, please consult the briefing paper The Biological Weapons Convention and the Negotiations for a Verification Protocol, available on our website.