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SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF PEACE AND CONFLICT
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STATEMENT

TO

MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION,

Geneva
(5- 9 December 2005)

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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am, Animesh Roul, Research Fellow at the Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict, New Delhi [INDIA], pleased to address you today on behalf of my organization, before the commencement of the third and final Meeting of State Parties focusing on the content, promulgation and adoption of "codes of conduct for scientists."

My organization, the Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (www.sspconline.org) aspires to carry forward research and advocacy on Arms control and non Proliferation issues among other urgent concern of our time. Although the region where we belong and operate is obsessed with all matters related to Nuclear weapon, SSPC, a relatively new comer, do dare and care to undertake research on biological weapon and emerging and remerging infectious disease as two of its core areas of studies.

I would be glad to bring to your notice about couple of works of SSPC in the current year. A Fact Sheet on BTWC on its completion of thirty years and a Dialogue paper on the occasion are well received in INDIA and abroad. Besides, SSPC is building a database by regular monitoring BW events and events related to both natural and deliberate disease spread. In the coming year, the Year of Sixth BTWC Review Conference, SSPC has plans to bring out a book devoted to the BW disarmament and a special issue in its in-house print journal (South Asia Journal of Conflict and Terror) on biological terrorism. The basic idea is to put forth the BW issue to public domain to raise the awareness and to initiate a dialogue within the South Asian civil society against the most insidious weapon.

Mr Chairman,

The meeting scheduled for this week is slated to focus on the aforesaid Codes of Conduct for Scientists and will certainly asses the earlier 'Experts Meet' on the issue held earlier this year, in Mid- June 2005.

It's now a common knowledge that advances in science and technology can have both positive and negative effects on our societies and the protagonists are our scientists. The vital question which grapples all of us today is "what if the Savior Scientists become hostile?"

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Mr Chairman,

The fear of Joshua Lederberg, the Nobel laureate, during the very outset of the biotechnology revolution in the 1970s seems to be a reality now. Lederberg expressed his concern when he feared that through this technology it might be possible to create infectious agents against which there would be no defense. Through biotechnology it is now possible that non-pathogenic microorganisms can be transformed into pathogenic microorganisms and, by altering the antigenic structure of a pathogen it would be easy to penetrate the human immune system. By the later method a terrorist group could unleash a disease into a population previously vaccinated.

It's beyond doubt that the nature and scope of bio-warfare has changed systematically due to the revolution in the life sciences. The crux of it lies in the rapid growth of the biotechnology and their extensive applications in every sphere of life. Although it offers many social and economic benefits, the flip side of it holds most horrifying details especially when the know–how and materials relevant to biological weapons are becoming widespread and get a pretext due to its dual-use character.

The progress in molecular biotechnology and the provisions of the Biological Weapon Convention (BTWC) for peaceful activities caused much of a concern as both the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and BTWC lack verification measures. However, the call for a national 'oversight' mechanism for the security and genetic engineering of pathogens, and appeal to devise a framework for bio-scientists in the form of a code of ethical conduct could cast a spell on the BTWC mechanism, if succeeded in totality.

Mr Chairman,

Although the study of the threats posed by modern biotechnology is still very hypothetical, it is for sure that any loopholes in the BTWC in any form can serve as a cover for rogue scientists and states to carry out research and development of offensive warfare agents using biotechnology and to make matter worse, Nanotechnology as a pretext.

And certainly for this, "Codes of conduct" need to be in place for all scientists irrespective of their nature, place and scope of jobs.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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