

November 8, 2002

Chairman Joseph Biden, Jr.  
Foreign Relations Committee  
SR-221  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman:

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned about the growing risks of biological weapons and call your urgent attention to the upcoming meeting of the 144 states parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) in Geneva on November 11-22. The United States' role at this Review Conference will strongly influence the success or failure of longstanding international efforts to reduce the threat of biological weapons and of terrorism using such weapons. We urge your committee to initiate closer oversight of the administration's position on the BWC, including hearings on the results of the Conference and the Bush administration's policy on biological weapons non-proliferation.

Although the convention has been in place for more than 25 years, the parties have not yet agreed on a compliance protocol to enforce the treaty's general prohibition on biological and toxin weapons. What's urgently needed is a legally binding system of declarations, inspections, confidence-building measures and an independent oversight agency, all operating together as part of an effective system, similar to what already exists under the treaties controlling nuclear and chemical weapons. We simply are not yet taking full advantage of available tools to combat all potential avenues of biological weapons proliferation, whether from individual activities, state-sponsored offensive programs, lax export controls or unchecked biodefense programs.

The administration has to date rejected meaningful negotiations on an enforcement protocol. John Bolton, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, has criticized the seven-year efforts by BWC member-states to negotiate a compliance protocol on the grounds that the proposed monitoring system would be ineffective and would jeopardize the trade secrets of U.S. biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies. Bolton argues that country-by-country penal laws (directed only at individuals) are a better approach. While that step has merit as the domestic complement to a broader international inspection system, it unfortunately would do nothing to prevent a biological incident before it happens.

In our view, these additional steps should be taken to make the BWC more effective:

Extend the UN Secretary General's mandate to conduct inspections of suspect biological weapons use to include inspections of suspicious facilities

Conclude a convention to criminalize the use of biological (and chemical) weapons

Conclude a convention on standardizing national regulations on the handling of dangerous pathogens

Create an independent and adequately funded secretariat to implement these agreements

Make the submission of certain confidence-building measures concluded by the 1986 and 1991 BWC Review Conferences legally binding

Adopt a code of conduct with clear criteria for defining what constitutes allowed or prohibited “defensive activities ” under the treaty.

While no approach is fool-proof, we must take action to strengthen the system of biological disarmament, which now depends wholly on voluntary compliance. Several important suggestions have been offered by the United Kingdom and U.S. allies, but without U.S. support as yet. The administration’s position on the BWC reinforces an alarming trend of unilaterally disassociating the United States from a series of treaties of global importance, including the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the International Criminal Court. At a time when our nation is striving to build the widest possible coalition for our own initiatives against terrorism, a refusal to engage in meaningful negotiations on the BWC is not credible, even to our closest allies.

In implementing your oversight authority for the BWC, we urge you to question the current U.S. position and initiate a public dialogue on why the United States is taking an obstructionist rather than a leadership position on this timely issue. Surely the improvement of all existing measures to curtail biological weapons must be part of the current debate about Iraq and its potential capacity to produce or use such weapons. The stalemate of last year’s BWC Review Conference, caused largely by the last-minute actions of the United States, must not be repeated. It is vital that member states work together at this Conference to conclude effective, preventative and legally binding measures to reduce the very real threats of biological weapons.

Representatives of our organizations would like to meet with you and your staff, soon after the Review Conference, to discuss these issues. Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

James K. Wyerman  
Executive Director  
20/20 Vision

Joni Arends  
Waste Programs Director  
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety

Coila Ash, Executive Director  
New Mexico Toxics Coalition

Dick Bennett  
President  
Omni Center For Peace, Justice, and Ecology,

Brent Blackwelder  
President  
Friends of the Earth

Jacqueline Cabasso  
Western States Legal Foundation

Michael Christ  
Executive Director  
International Physicians for the Prevention of  
Nuclear War

Elaine Cimino  
Citizens For Environmental Safeguards

David Cline  
President  
Veterans for Peace

Jay Coghlan  
Nuclear Watch of New Mexico

Joan Collins  
Peace Networks of the Ozarks

Pat Conover  
Legislative Director  
United Church of Christ  
Justice and Witness Ministries

David Culp  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Sue Dayton  
Citizen Action (New Mexico)

Peter J. Davies,  
UN/US Representative

Saferworld\*

Marie Dennis  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Dr. Ian Davis  
Director  
British American Security Information Council  
(BASIC)

Kim Foreman  
Health Educator  
Environmental Health Watch

Randall Caroline Forsberg, Ph.D.  
Director  
Institute for Defense and Disarmament  
Studies

James Galbraith  
Chair of the Board of  
Directors  
Economists Allied for Arms Reduction

Lisbeth Gronlund  
Co-Director and Senior Staff Scientist  
Global Security Program  
Union of Concerned Scientists

Barbara Green  
Executive Director  
Churches' Center for Theology and Public  
Policy

Erik K. Gustafson  
Executive Director  
Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC)

Howard Hallman  
Chair  
Methodists United for Peace with Justice

Edward Hammond  
Director  
The Sunshine Project

Rabia Terri Harris  
Coordinator  
Muslim Peace Fellowship

William D. Hartung

Director, Arms Trade Resource Center  
Senior Fellow, World Policy Institute

Bryan Thomas Hissong  
Legislative Associate  
Church of the Brethren Washington Office

Mary Elizabeth Hoinkes  
Former General Counsel  
Arms Control and Disarmament Agency\*

John Isaacs  
President  
Council for a Livable World

Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory  
Director, Washington Office  
Presbyterian Church, (USA)

Marylia Kelley  
Tri-Valley CAREs

Daryl Kimball  
Executive Director  
Arms Control Association

Don Kraus  
Executive Director  
Campaign for UN Reform

Howard Lyman  
President  
Voice for a Viable Future

Kevin Martin  
Executive Director  
Peace Action

Tom Marshall  
Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center

James Matlack  
Director, Washington Office  
American Friends Service Committee

Daniel Mayton, Ph.D.  
President  
Psychologists for Social Responsibility

Alistair Millar  
VP and Director, Washington Office

Fourth Freedom Forum

Robert K. Musil  
Executive Director  
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Christopher Payne  
Senior Analyst  
Natural Resources Defense Council

Dave Robinson  
Executive Director  
Pax Christi USA

Susan Shaer  
Executive Director  
Women's Action for New Directions

Charles Sheehan-Miles  
National Co-Coordinator  
Veterans for Common Sense

Brian Shields  
Executive Director  
Amigos Bravos (New Mexico)

Ira Shorr  
Director  
Back from the Brink

Sandy Silver, co-president  
Darien De Lu, co-president  
Women's International League for Peace and  
Freedom, United States Section

Katie Mae Simpson  
Recycling Action  
Toxics Action Center

Alice Slater  
GRACE Public Fund

Greg Speeter  
Executive Director  
National Priorities Project  
Silvi Sterr  
International Secretary  
Women's International League  
for Peace and Freedom

Dr. Kathleen Sullivan  
Co-ordinator, Nuclear Weapons Education

and Action Project, New York Metro Area  
Educators for Social Responsibility

Ellen Thomas  
Executive Director  
Proposition One Committee

Kathy Thornton, RSM  
National Coordinator  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice  
Lobby

Tara Thornton  
Executive Director  
Military Toxics Project

Kalynda Tilges  
Executive Director  
Shundahai Network (Utah, Nevada, Oregon)

Jonathan B. Tucker, Ph.D.  
Senior Fellow, 2002-03  
U.S. Institute of Peace\*

Paul F. Walker, Ph.D.  
Legacy Program Director  
Global Green USA

(\*Affiliation listed for identification purposes only)

*cc: Chairman Carl Levin, Senate Armed Services Committee;  
Chairman Henry Hyde, International Relations Committee;  
Chairman Bob Stump, House Armed Services Committee  
Members of Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Members of Senate Armed Services Committee  
Members of International Relations Committee  
Members of House of Armed Services Committee*

For more information, please contact James Wyerman, 20/20 Vision, at 202-833-2020  
or Daryl Kimball, Arms Control Association 202-463-8270.