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CHEMICAL AND BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) WEAPONS

Letter dated 24 June 1983 from the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the
Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

On behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I have the honour to request that the following views relating to General Assembly resolution 37/98 D be circulated as an official document of the Assembly under item 61 of the preliminary list.

The United Kingdom has noted the views of the Permanent Missions of the Soviet Union and Viet Nam in their letters of 30 March 1983 (A/38/131) and 18 April 1983 (A/38/162) respectively, regarding General Assembly resolution 37/98 D concerning provisional arrangements for investigating and dealing with alleged breaches of the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. 1/

The United Kingdom is fully committed to the early conclusion of a comprehensive and fully verifiable ban on the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons. In this connection, the United Kingdom tabled a draft convention on chemical weapons as long ago as 1976. Moreover the United Kingdom has tabled, in February 1982 and March 1983, working papers in the Committee on Disarmament (CD 244 and CD 353) containing detailed proposals relating to the verification provisions of a future chemical weapons convention.

* A/38/50/Rev.1.

Chemical weapons rightly provoke revulsion in the whole of the civilized world. Continuing reports that these weapons have been used in South-East Asia and Afghanistan give cause for justifiable concern. Unfortunately, the 1925 Geneva Protocol, for all its merits, does not contain any provision for verification. Thus States Parties have no way of being certain that other Parties are fulfilling their Treaty obligations. Without a system of verification, doubts can arise and will persist unless properly investigated. This can destroy whatever international confidence in the Treaty may have been built up over the years.

General Assembly resolution 37/98 D is limited to calling upon States that have not yet adhered to the 1925 Geneva Protocol to become States Parties; calling upon all States Parties to comply with the terms of the Protocol and upon the Committee on Disarmament to expedite its negotiations on a convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons, and to asking the United Nations Secretary-General to establish means to investigate alleged breaches of the Protocol. The resolution does not seek to amend the Protocol. It cannot, as a matter of law, do so. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding. Nor does the United Kingdom understand why the Soviet Union regards the resolution as being in some way "illegal". Resolution 37/98 D is an attempt to highlight the importance of the Geneva Protocol and cannot be interpreted as an attempt to undermine it.

The mechanism to be established by resolution 37/98 D is considered to be only a temporary measure until an effective chemical weapons convention comes into operation. As the United Kingdom has frequently stated, such a convention would have to contain adequate provision for international on-site inspections.

The United Kingdom is disappointed to learn that the Soviet Union will not be co-operating with the United Nations Secretary-General in the implementation of resolution 37/98 D. It is only with the co-operation of all States that alleged breaches of the 1925 Geneva Protocol can be fully investigated.

(Signed) F. D. BERMAN
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

Notes

1/ League of Nations, Treaty Series, vol. XCIV (1929), No. 2138, p. 65.
