

## **FAS Comments on US Rejection of the BWC Protocol**

Delivered by Barbara Hatch Rosenberg at NGO Seminar for Ad Hoc Group, 25 July 01

Yesterday at a press conference at the White House, Avis Bohlen of the State Department and Robert Joseph of the National Security Council pronounced the Protocol useless. Today the same message was delivered by Ambassador Don Mahley, the head of the US delegation at the Geneva negotiations.

The specious reasons given for that decision are intended for an uninformed domestic audience. They will not convince the assembled official and non-governmental experts here in Geneva. The United States declares the goals of the Protocol to be unreachable, and at the same time states that the Protocol is too weak and needs further work.

Under questioning in Washington, the officials stated that the US delegation will remain at the negotiations in order to prevent agreement on a protocol without the United States, as has just happened in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations on global warming.

US officials have felt it necessary to emphasize their strong support for the Biological Weapons Convention—while at the same time rejecting any means for demonstrating US compliance with the Convention. In a possibly related statement, Ambassador Mahley admitted, during questioning at a Congressional hearing on July 10, that some US government activities “raise ambiguities” regarding their intention.

The Bush Administration, which is a minority government, is intent on using its brief opportunity to impose unilateral security decisions on the rest of the world, and to do so in as irreversible a manner as possible.

As alternatives to the Protocol, the United States suggests extracted fragments of the Protocol, which are not feasible or meaningful in isolation and which, in any event, would require international agreement. Other alternatives that have been raised would require societal actions that can't be legislated by governments.

The Federation of American Scientists has worked for strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention for twelve years. As scientists, we understand all too well the global dangers of using deliberate disease as a weapon. We recognize that there is no way to defend populations from such weapons. Therefore, the world cannot afford to turn down any measure that would contribute to PREVENTION. We have studied the technical possibilities extensively and we are convinced that agreement on a Protocol containing compliance and scientific cooperation measures is the most effective international action available.

We urge the members of the Ad Hoc Group negotiating the Protocol to find a way to preserve their efforts and maintain their resolve. It took the United States fifty years to ratify the Geneva Protocol outlawing the use of biological weapons. But time moves faster now. Sooner or later, the United States will have to join in the common endeavor, and we pledge our best efforts to make that happen.