



**BIOTECHNOLOGY, WEAPONS  
AND HUMANITY**



**ICRC**



**ICRC**

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# Why the ICRC Appeal on "Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity"?

8th February 1918

- "..barbarous invention which science is in the course of perfecting.. "
- "..more murderous and refined in its cruelty"
- "..protest with all the strength of our being"
- "..can only describe as criminal"



# Science and technology: a fundamental question....

All advances in science have at some point been turned to hostile use. *What if the advances in life sciences and biotechnology are likewise turned to hostile use?*

The ICRC's Appeal (September 2002) called for recognition of

- Risks
- Rules
- Responsibilities



# What are the risks?

- Existing diseases more harmful
- New, exotic or more attractive agents
- Easier and safer delivery
- Steps towards ethnic targeting



# What are the rules?

- 1925 Geneva Protocol
- 1972 Biological Weapons Convention
- 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention
- Customary law prohibition on toxicity
- National law



# What are the responsibilities?

**All** actors should:

- work on action points in Appeal and..
- recognise **all** necessary measures
- work in a '**Web of Prevention**'



# In summary, the ICRC appeals to...

- All political and military authorities to strengthen their commitment to IHL norms which prohibit the hostile uses of biological agents and to work together to subject potentially dangerous biotechnology to effective controls
- The scientific and medical communities, industry and civil society to ensure that potentially dangerous biological knowledge and agents be subject to effective controls



# Conclusions from the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, Kuala Lumpur, 2005

- Advances in the life sciences can increase dangers of their hostile use
- The life science community has ethical and sometimes legal responsibilities
- Education on risks, role and responsibilities of scientists is essential
- Urgent need to raise awareness of scientists about 1925 Geneva Protocol, 1972 BWC, 1993 CWC
- Scientists must advise about the implications of policy choices





# Conclusions from the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, Kuala Lumpur, 2005

- Governments should ensure respect for international and national norms prohibiting hostile use
- Encourage States to ratify BWC, CWC and similar agreements
- Call for States to adopt the necessary legislation to implement Convention obligations
- Regional and international cooperation necessary
- Reinforce BW-related import/export controls



# More discussion needed

- How to balance between publicising research and preventing misuse
- How to support programmes promoting safe use of life sciences
- How to protect whistle blowers
- How to address conflicts of interest between adhering to norms and nationalist agenda



# Thus....

- A comprehensive multi- disciplinary approach among all relevant actors including NGOs, industry, civil society.
- At the State level, necessary for coordination between Ministries of education, science & technology, environment, defence, foreign affairs, health etc



# BREAK THROUGH OR OUTBREAK?



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It has become one of the toughest areas of work in public health. Emerging zoonotic diseases threaten the world's population and the environment. It is critical to understand these risks and to develop strategies to prevent them and to control them by increasing the resilience of our communities. To learn more about the risks of zoonotic diseases, visit the ICRG at [www.scienceforhumanity.org](http://www.scienceforhumanity.org).

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