

## Keynote Address

### **International Conference on Health and Security: *Building Partnerships for Biological Threat Prevention, Preparedness, and Response***

The Westin Hotel, Georgetown  
5-6 September, 2012  
Washington, D.C.

Ambassadors, distinguished speakers, and honored guests, thank you for joining us for this important event, which brings together representatives of health and security communities from around the world to address the urgent challenge of dealing with biological threats.

As you know, the theme of our conference is ***Building Partnerships for Biological Threat Prevention, Preparedness, and Response***. We believe the concept of partnerships is critical because disease does not recognize national borders, and our Federal Government alone cannot address all the complex challenges posed by biological threats. We must all be involved in the solution.

Planning and preparedness must involve both domestic and international partners to increase global capacities to control infectious diseases and help prevent biological weapons proliferation and bioterrorism. We must bring together health, security, and law enforcement communities to raise awareness of biological risks and how to manage them, just as the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention – to which we all are Parties – has encouraged such partnerships to build sustainable capabilities to respond to deadly disease outbreaks.

President Obama has long-considered biological threat reduction to be a national priority. In November, 2009, he issued the *National Strategy for Countering Biological Threats*, which outlines the U.S. “whole-of-Government” approach to reducing the risks posed by the deliberate or accidental release of a biological agent. Our Strategy is guided by a number of assumptions. I would like to highlight three of them.

1. First, one of the most effective ways to deter a deliberate attack and minimize the consequences, should an attack occur, is to ensure that communities can respond quickly and effectively to infectious disease outbreaks.
2. Second, the ability to rapidly detect, contain, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks will advance the health of populations and the security of nations.
3. Third, it will not be possible to prevent all biological events, but a coordinated series of actions can help reduce the risk.

Health and security are inextricably linked in cases of disease outbreaks. Strong health systems strengthen fragile states, promote social and economic progress, and ultimately

protect the security of all nations. This is a mission and a responsibility the President takes very seriously, as do we all.

This recognition that health is a global security issue is not new. The destabilizing impact of AIDS led the Clinton Administration to classify the disease not just as a health threat but as a national security threat. President Obama similarly prioritized the fight against infectious diseases at the United Nations General Assembly when he said, *“We must come together to prevent, detect, and fight every kind of biological danger – whether it is a pandemic like H1N1, a terrorist threat, or a treatable disease.”*

Recent examples of outbreaks such as SARS and H1N1, and the threat of bioterrorism, have not only demonstrated the need for urgent, collective action but have brought changes to the way we address biological risks and health emergencies.

- The interconnectedness of populations increases the destructive potential of disease outbreaks, putting the global community at risk.
- The consequences of these global threats affect multiple sectors and have required us to think collaboratively about our approaches to address all aspects of the risks.
- Preparedness efforts to address emerging diseases or possible attacks from malevolent groups require the same health core capacities of detecting, reporting, and responding. Our efforts in these areas are mutually reinforcing.

We have learned many things during the past decade since the anthrax letter attacks in the United States. We learned that we cannot always anticipate when and where biological dangers will present themselves and, despite our best efforts to be prepared, we will face unexpected challenges. We learned that successful efforts to detect, contain, and respond to biological threats require a concerted effort from health and security communities and close coordination among all sectors of government. And we learned that effective partnerships among public and private institutions, both nationally and internationally, are essential.

We are fortunate that we have not yet faced a catastrophic biological event, but we must not be complacent. A biological incident in one part of the world may increase the risk to all of us. We also recognize that the risk is evolving in unpredictable ways, and those with ill intent increasingly will be able to exploit advancements in biotechnology for illicit purposes.

The time is now for us to take steps to ensure that advances in the life sciences have a positive effect on people of all nations, while risks related to the misuse of science are minimized. The revolution in life sciences is global in nature, and people of all nations can benefit from cooperative efforts to reduce biological risks.

We have invited you here today to pursue a common vision where disease no longer endangers the security and prosperity of nations. Our Conference organizers have designed a

program that encourages us to share our respective experiences, challenges, and best practices for developing collaborative, real-world solutions to biological threats.

We urge you to take advantage of this remarkable assemblage of global experts to learn how other countries are dealing with bioterrorism, global health threats, biosecurity gaps, and the coordination of multisectoral responses across health, security, law enforcement communities.

We also hope you will share your own perspectives on biological threat prevention and response. We welcome your inputs and look forward to continuing our work with all of you on this critical problem.