

THE BIOLOGY FOR PEACE PROGRAM

When President Eisenhower announced the “Atoms for Peace” program, no international organization had ever existed to oversee how national governments put to use any technology, least of all a technology with such significant capabilities for good and for ill. At the core of the plan was establishment of a new international atomic energy agency with the mission of “devising methods whereby fissionable material would be allocated to serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind.”

Decades later, it is time to call for the “Biology for Peace” program and establishment of a new international biological sciences agency (IBSA) with the mission of devising methods whereby scientific expertise and sensitive genomic material would be allocated to serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind, primarily to prevent and combat contagious disease.

The coronavirus has shut down much of the world. It is, beyond measure, a threat to international peace and security. Predicting its implications for humanity is as difficult as would have been forecasting the implications of nuclear physics in the immediate aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But everyone would agree that, like the use of nuclear weapons, this is an experience never to be repeated.

While the coronavirus is a natural pandemic, it must be noted that experts have long warned about the potential for the intentional infliction of disease, whether by a state or by a criminal organization. For many years, weapons control experts have decried the absence of an “Organization for the Prevention of Biological Weapons”, comparable to the OPCW or IAEA. These organizations’ verification apparatus need not be replicated in the context of biology, but their other major functions are very apt.

The Biology for Peace Program's principal objectives, and the IBSA's major tasks should include:

1. Serving as the central repository and operational manager of technology for preventing contagious disease
 - a. Undertaking and sponsoring long-term research and development concerning equipment, compounds, and techniques against contagious disease
 - b. Convene high level international fora on matters concerning contagion, and to provide a direct information link from and to the United Nations Security Council
2. Promoting the global distribution of biological science, especially to developing regions, in compliance with rigorous standards of safety and security
3. Marshalling global scientific resources, intelligence, and capabilities,
 - a. in the event of a contagious outbreak, for building defenses against the disease. The IBSA would not duplicate the health services of the WHO and other agencies, but would facilitate coordination among the world's bioscience community to develop unique interventions.
 - b. If there is reasonable to believe that a violation of the Biological Weapons Convention has been or is about to committed, the IBSA would serve as the Security Council's primary source of scientific expertise and would help coordinate public health responses with law enforcement and security responses.

Contagion -- along with nuclear weapons, climate change, and degradation of the oceans -- are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. If the Biology for Peace Program can reduce one of these threats, it deserves serious consideration.