

Talking points

Hon. Pindi Chana, Chair of PGA International Council

Panel 2: *Promoting the universality of the BWC: Challenges for ratification and the role of parliamentarians*

PGA 37th Annual Parliamentary Forum

The Role of Parliamentarians in Support of Peace and Security

- Greeting remarks
- My name is Pindi Chana, Minister of Community Development, Gender and Children, member of the Parliament of Tanzania and Chair of PGA's International Council.
- The United Republic of Tanzania signed the Biological Weapons Convention on 16 August 1972 but has yet to ratify it, thus allowing its entry into force in Tanzania. Even though Tanzania has yet to formally ratify the Convention, the ratification process started in 2008 when representatives of Tanzania to the BWC Meeting of States Parties declared that the country was interested in joining the convention. At that time, they added that they had not yet determined the national authority that would be in charge of implementing the Convention, but were determined to advance the ratification process.
- In 2009, the ratification process in Tanzania started and was supposedly well advanced, which was confirmed in 2010 by several officials present at the Meeting of States Parties. Indeed, on that occasion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared having brought the dossier of ratification to the Cabinet, which had then to be transmitted to the Parliament for approval before requiring the signature of the President. The representatives of Tanzania in Geneva however considered that the upcoming election year would slow down the advancement of the process, even if they committed to push the dossier forward.
- The elections of 2010 and the many cabinet shuffles did indeed slow down the ratification process in Tanzania, as there was no report of progress during many years. Tanzania participated in events and workshops on universality during this period, but did not provide additional information. However, most recently, in 2015, my country expressed its intention to ratify the BWC in the near future during a regional workshop organised in Nairobi in January 2015.
- I would like to add that 2015 was also an election year in Tanzania, both presidential and legislative, and that this fact may have delayed once again the progress of the dossier at the national level. It is thus particularly important for us parliamentarians to promote the ratification, reach out to Government officials and ensure that the ongoing process is fully and completely carried out. As the priorities often shift after a national election, particularly considering that the presidential elections in Tanzania took place late October 2015, just one month ago, I believe it is our duty as parliamentarians to raise and maintain awareness on the BWC in the new Cabinet.
- The universality of the BWC is necessary in order to achieve a complete disarmament at the international level of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, while also preventing and prohibiting the development, production and use of biological weapons by individuals and non-State actors. This would also undoubtedly contribute

to peace and security at a particular time of tensions and possible use of those weapons by terrorist groups.

- Despite these considerations, most of the countries that have not ratified the BWC are in Africa and the Pacific. Indeed, to date there are 6 Signatory States in Africa that have yet to ratify it, including Tanzania, and 6 others that are not party to the Convention, while a vast majority of African States have ratified or acceded to other disarmament treaties, such as the Convention on Chemical Weapons (CWC) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. I therefore consider that it is highly important to promote the ratification of the BWC in Tanzania and in Africa in general, in order to ensure at least a regional position on the comprehensive prohibition of biological weapons.
- The ratification of the Convention however faces a certain number of challenges. First, and as I was evoking earlier, the changes in government and elections, both governmental and legislative, can impair political will and therefore disrupt and delay any current ongoing ratification process, as it was the case for Tanzania.
- Moreover, I believe that there could be a lack of capacity to join the BWC in Africa, that is the necessary human and financial resources, particularly considering the comprehensive approach that needs to be taken for an effective implementation. Internal political and administrative difficulties can also create obstacles, as for example in some countries in Africa where the ratification or accession process can be lengthy and require the fulfilment of numerous national procedures, such as the approval of different ministries.
- In addition, I think that the BWC is not perceived as a priority in Africa because States do not feel concerned by a disarmament regime considering that they often do not possess biological weapons and have no intention to engage in activities using or developing biological agents. This aspect might have changed in the past few years, as I believe African States have assessed more accurately the risk and threat of biological agents being used by individuals and non-State actors for hostile purposes.
- However, I consider that there is still a lack of awareness in Africa on the principles and objectives of the BWC, as well as the many benefits of joining the Convention. One of the strategies to achieve universality would thus be to use incentives; such as the exchange of technology and information that would not doubt benefit African States or enhanced national, regional and international security.
- Other benefits may be invoked, such as the fact that strong biosafety and biosecurity systems encourage investments in the field of biological and biotechnology research, which is a considerable argument in light of the economic prospects of such investments.
- Ratification of or accession to the BWC would also comply with the obligations contained in the Resolution 1540 of the United Nations Security Council, which provides for the obligation for States to prohibit support to non-State actors seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction, including biological.
- As parliamentarians, we must thus promote and encourage the ratification or accession to the BWC, within our respective countries but also with fellow parliamentarians in the region and internationally. We can play a decisive role initiating and supporting such process, and we can also reach out to key decision-makers within the Executive Branch

and urge them to support and take action on this major issue. In this framework, we can inform them on the issues and challenges of the BWC, and how to respond to them in the best way.

- It is also our role to raise awareness on the principals and objectives of the BWC, as well as the many benefits that exist from joining the Convention. To do as such, participating in events and workshops is a key aspect, as well as informing the general public on the serious threat posed by bioterrorism. This will help generate or strengthen political will, by putting into context the importance and current relevance of the ratification and implementation of the BWC.
- After – or before ratification as that is a requirement for certain countries – ratification or accession, we can also play a crucial role in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention, so as to ensure that its provisions are fully complied with and that the biorisk assessment and management is correctly conducted.
- I am glad to participate in this Annual Forum and exchange with you on this important issue, in order to improve our understanding of the issues surrounding the universality and implementation of the BWC. I would also like to prompt all parliamentarians gathered today to advocate for the BWC in their respective countries and start ratification processes, if appropriate, and I strongly encourage you to adopt the Plan of Action, which will provide for detailed type of actions that should be undertaken.