

What Can Lawmakers Do To Help Make the World Safer by Promoting the Universal Enforcement of the United Nations Convention on Biological Weapons?

Hon. Atty. Worlea-Saywah Dunah, Liberia

Madam Chair and distinguished colleagues, we bring you greetings from the National Legislature of Liberia and at the same time express our thanks and appreciation to the government and people of El Salvador whose splendid hospitality we have been enjoying since arrival. Gracias!

Context and Background

It is indeed a tough task we give ourselves in the PGA, but a task worthy of our aspirations because humanity is daily crying and dying from weapons created by humanity. Mankind is the only creature that possesses and exercises the capacity to be self destructive and self elevating at the same time. Biological Weapons represents one of the fearsome uses of knowledge to harm people and it is our duty to fight to make the world free of such development.

The specter of biological weapons and its devastating effects is a very scary development which is as terrifying as the feel of nuclear bomb dropping on a community. Indeed the Convention on BWC is a step in the right direction given the huge possibilities of what damages that biological weapon can do in view of the fact that it can become genetic.

Unlike other weapons, biological weapons have the capacity, especially virus to multiple themselves, mutate, change shape and become more deadly than its manufacturers ever imagined. For example studies in our region during the Ebola Virus shows that it was changing or mutating at the rate of three hundred times within a single month.

For us from the Mano River Union Basin, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, we have felt firsthand the effect of a dangerous virus disease attack- the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic which hit our region in 2014 and still resists total clearance.

When you saw on international televisions angry Guineans villagers attacking medical humanitarians' workers and driving them away then you understand what their fears were. As remote and mostly illiterate without the use of phones, internets etc, these people are, they were hounded by the fear of Ebola as been a biological weapon being used by the developed countries to decimate our population. They do not know of this Convention but they believe that the production of biological weapons continues and that outbreak is a result.

In my own country Liberia, where we shake hands every time we meet people, even complete strangers, that ancient tradition was painfully dropped; for the first time in my life I didn't shake hands for over six months. You come from outside and your kids will not come to welcome you until you have taken a bath and put on new clothes- that's when you feel that it is at least safe for your loved ones to come around you.

Yes, the history of Ebola outbreak in a remote Guinean village, where the first person to be infected was a two years old baby is both interesting and mind boggling. Call it coincidence or whatever you call it; but the first person to get infected was a baby; and this baby got sick and was diagnosed with Ebola two days after taking a free vaccine administered by a team of foreign health workers. It is further confounding that that remote rural Guinean village close to the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia is over a thousand miles away from the last known case of Ebola which was in Uganda.

And that is how come even as we speak today in these countries, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea there is a very strong belief, one that is spoken of freely in the streets, on the media that the Ebola devastation in our region was a biological weapon test that went wrong.

Later on during the course of the epidemic, people claiming to be scientists from the United States and Asia variously asserted in professional papers that a link exist between the outbreak and the development of biological weapons. These view are all online.

I have simply brought this story to illustrate the importance of this particular work by PGA because in the Mano River Basin we live in fear of what we do not know and what we have no capacity to scientifically investigate - but are a victim society. And I am not saying I believe what the villagers in Guinea believe which is well documented internationally; yet I insist that biological weapons ban is a must for mankind.

In Syria we have seen the unrestricted use of chemical and toxic materials in the war. We also note that non-state actors are being supplied arms in the direct violation of the Arms Trade Treaty by state party to this very Treaty, the ATT. These same arms will find their way to other non-state actors in other parts of the world and the incestuous circulation of deaths and destructions of innocent people continues worldwide. This vicious cycle must be broken and as lawmakers we must warm to the task as before our eyes daily we see the intensification and escalation of gun violence worldwide marching parallel to increase production of arms.

THE ROLE OF LAWMAKERS

Madam Chair and distinguished international lawmakers, Partners, ladies and gentlemen I am therefore sincerely convinced that there is a way out of our recent turmoil as a human race.

In my view lawmakers as usual can lead the charge in ensuring that all nations can do the followings:

1. Ratify this Convention;
2. Create an international monitoring system to curtail its production;
3. Effect the destruction of existing stockpiles;
4. Criminalize its development and production.
5. Petition and bring to the attention the Legislatures of Producers countries the need to act and to join the PGA work;
6. Send Special Delegation of Parliamentarians to the major weapons producers to meet the Parliament and the Leadership to press our case;

7. Openly name and shame those nations that are responsible for the continuous production of weapons.

However allow me to opine further that what the world needs is to put a hold on the growth of the arms industry, this industry according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute continues to grow at the rate of 16% per year and its total revenue is over 400 billion United States Dollars per year as of 2014.

This industry that exists to produce weapons just to kill human beings must stop! The world will continue to talk about peace when every year newer weapons are being made is one of the historical contradictions that plague humanity.

Unfortunately, the economic benefits of the industry to the producers' nations render our call a dead one. In the United States we have witnessed that even President Obama is unable to rein much needed control over this situation and his best effort is to join protest marches- the arms industry is a behemoth of immense powers!

And so my brothers and sisters, when we see the leader of the most powerful nation on earth unable to bring this matter of the unfettered growth of arms and gun violence in his own country then one must note the near impossibility of the task we give ourselves. But much more pathetic is the realization that all of these Conventions, Treaties, etc. are just part of the effort towards the dream which humanity can only dream – a gun free world.

Call for Independent Scientific Investigation into the Ebola outbreak

Truly biological/bacteriological weapons are very dangerous; for us we will never know the truth about Ebola because of low capacity, low level of technology, low level of influence on the global scene; but what we can for sure tell you is that our people live in fear daily of a disease which in their view is a direct biological weapons and that our population are the guinea pigs.

Fellow colleagues we stand before you today to demand of the world that rallied to our call during the dark days of Ebola for an immediate commissioning of an

independent international scientific investigation into the root cause of the outbreak of the deadly Ebola Virus Disease that plagues the countries of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. And appeal to the Parliamentarians for Global Action to take the lead in making this demand.

We are convinced that such an investigation will contribute immensely not only to allay the fears of our people but substantively towards combating this deadly grim killer virus.

Conclusions

Finally, my dear brothers and sisters, Parliamentarians for peaceful humanity, I say to you today that a better world beckons, a new world is possible; a world where the institution and industry of development and manufacturing of weapons of all kinds will be prohibited and criminalized; a time where nation-state will not allow the establishment of arms industry. That world is a dream, a dream that eludes mankind yet a dream that we here must commit ourselves to dream every day of our life.

We therefore urge this body to continue the battle against arms and weapons of all kinds and grade and to pursue the ideal of a safer world for humanity, if we as lawmakers can through these activities continue the work, prosperity will be grateful to build on the good works we have began. Let PGA March on.....

God bless you all.

December 1, 2015, San Salvador