

PRESENTATION FOR HON. SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

***PGA REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON PROMOTING RATIFICATION AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BWC***

FREETOWN

27TH MARCH, 2017

Your Excellencies,

Fellow Members of Parliament from Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Somalia,

UN Resident Coordinator,

High Commissioner of Canada to Sierra Leone,

Chief of the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention,

Ladies and Gentlemen

All other protocols observed.

I am very pleased to welcome you to Freetown for this Regional Africa PGA Parliamentary Workshop to Promote Ratification and Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention.

For those of you who are here in our beautiful country for the first time, I extend a very special welcome as well as to those of you who are returning to visit us once again.

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has had a long and cherished relationship with PGA with a PGA National Group in place for over 15 years and officially recognized by our Parliament.

Our Members have participated in countless PGA Meetings around the world in the past 20 years on matters of national, regional and international concern.

Here I must remember former MP and now our Ambassador to the EU and Belgium, Hon. Ibrahim Sorie, Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai as well as Hon. Claude Kamanda among our most active PGA Members

We were also pleased to host a PGA Workshop here in Freetown in January 2008 – nearly 10 years ago -during which occasion thePGA Delegation had the opportunity to meet with another past PGA Member, His Excellency President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma.

President Koroma is also the Recipient of the 2011 Defender of Democracy Award of PGA.

So it is a great pleasure to have this august organization back with us once again here in Freetown and I hope it will be a good opportunity for us to revitalize our links with the organization

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a matter of deep regret that we live in a world today where we face many threats of very different kinds to our individual and collective well being and security.

These threats confront all of us, in every country of the world.

They are sometimes caused by disease, caused by nature and we here in West Africa are sadly no strangers to the devastating consequences of such calamities.

But there are also threats that are entirely man made and the proliferation of weapons is one such threat.

Again, not just here in Sierra Leone, but all over Africa and, indeed, in several other regions of the world, we have seen the devastating human impact in terms of conflict and loss of human life and other grave suffering that has been occasioned by the inadequate regulation of arms and weapons.

What is important for us all to understand is that this threat is not confined to conventional weapons alone.

In recent years, we have all read increasingly troubling reports of how Non State Actors and Groups, including terrorist organizations, are not satisfied simply to seek to acquire conventional weapons in order to further their murderous agendas.

Now we understand they are also, simultaneously, seeking to access Weapons of Mass Destruction, including biological and chemical weapons. Reports of ISIS and Boko Haram and Al Shabaab now trying to get their hands on these terrifying weapons, chemical and biological, should shake all of us to our very core.

It also requires and demands immediate action by all those in a position to do so, including ratification and implementation of treaties which aim to make it more difficult for such groups to get their hands on such weapons.

One such treaty is the Biological Weapons Convention.

The Biological Weapons Treaty was the first treaty outlawing the production and stockpiling of a whole category of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

It was adopted in 1972 and entered into force in 1975.

178 countries are currently party to this Treaty, a fact which reflects its extreme importance

Sierra Leone signed the BWC in 1972 and ratified it in June 1976.

However, because of the new threats I have just described from Non State Actors, it would be very helpful/important for us to undertake a review of our existing national legislation to ensure it adequately addresses all threats, not just those that existed in 1976.

I am very pleased that just in the past 12 months, all of our fellow Mano River Union countries – Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, understanding this new urgency, have all ratified the BWC, as has also Angola and, in Asia, Nepal.

PGA Members in all of these countries played a central role in achieving these ratifications.

As many of us are aware, some of the diseases we have experienced at first hand, including Ebola, have the potential, in the wrong hands, to be weaponized into biological weapons.

Here with us today are MPs from Tanzania, Namibia, Somalia, Chad and the Central African Republic. You all come from countries that have not yet ratified the BWC and it is my sincere hope that this Workshop will serve to motivate you to return home and I beseech you to press your respective Governments to delay no further in taking this long over-due action.

From the DRC, Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau and my own Sierra Leone.

We all hail from countries that have already ratified this Treaty.

But there can be no room for complacency.

For little purpose is served simply ratifying a treaty, unless it is also properly and robustly implemented.

So I hope this Workshop will spur you on to investigate the current status of BWC implementing legislation in your respective countries with a view to ensuring its adequacy and updating to reflect more modern day threats.

It is also important for all of us to share with the Implementation Support Unit of the BWC in Geneva on an annual basis Confidence Building Measure Declarations which outline what steps we are taking – from one year to the next – to implement this Treaty.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

You have an ambitious Program ahead of you and not so much time in which to complete it.

I understand you will also adopt a Plan of Action at the conclusion of the Workshop to facilitate specific follow-up steps to be taken by you once you return home.

I urge you all to take a pro-active approach when you return to your respective countries.

This Workshop is a Beginning, not an End.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish you and this Workshop every success.

Thank you.