

**Statement**  
**by Daniel Feakes, Chief, BWC Implementation Support Unit, United Nations Office for**  
**Disarmament Affairs, Geneva Branch**

**Regional Africa Workshop on Universality and National Implementation of the BWC**  
**Freetown, Sierra Leone**  
**27-28 March 2017**

Excellencies  
Distinguished Members of Parliament  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address you on the occasion of this meeting organized by Parliamentarians for Global Action for the purpose of addressing the universality and national implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

I commend PGA for organizing this Regional Workshop and the Parliament of Sierra Leone for hosting it. Also the Canadian Global Partnership Programme for providing the financial support to make it possible. I am disappointed to not be able to join you in Freetown myself, however I am organizing a workshop here this week, and so this Skype connection will have to suffice. I hope however that we will be able to continue the good work done during the meeting, and build momentum towards the universalization of the BWC.

I would like to express my thanks to PGA for their campaign in support of the BWC, and to those parliamentarians from around the world who signed the “San Salvador Plan Of Action To Promote Universality and National Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention” at the 37<sup>th</sup> PGA Annual Forum in December 2015. The Plan of Action demonstrates that support from Parliamentarians is crucial for the negotiation, implementation and sustainability of instruments such as the BWC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The threat from biological weapons is real. The dramatic consequences of the Ebola outbreak which severely affected Sierra Leone and its neighbours serve as a stark reminder of the threat posed to humanity by emerging communicable diseases. More than 11,000 people were killed, 28,000 infected and over US\$2 billion in economic losses were caused in the countries most affected by the outbreak. In this context, the billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates has noted *“Of all the things that could kill more than 10 million people around the world, the most likely is an epidemic stemming from either natural causes or bioterrorism”*. It is no coincidence that recent high-level forums and reports have identified bio-weapons as one technology that will transform warfare and impact both our individual and collective security.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) represents one of the fundamental pillars in multilateral disarmament. It was the first treaty to outlaw an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Since its entry into force in 1975, a total of 178 States have joined the Convention and there is growing

momentum towards joining the Convention. Just last year, a total of five States joined the BWC – of which four were from Africa (Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia). This illustrates to me that African countries see the Convention as relevant to their concerns. I would hereby like to acknowledge the contribution to these efforts by the African Union. In March 2015, the then Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, called upon all AU Member States "that have not yet done so to ratify and accede to the Convention without further delay." She further called on all Member States to "implement the necessary national measures in compliance with its provisions." I would again like to also acknowledge the exceptional work of PGA in this regard.

The BWC is a widely accepted norm against biological weapons with a growing membership. However, in order to make this norm universal and to make clear that *all* States reject the very notion of biological warfare, it is important that all States are party to the Convention. Africa is currently the region with the highest number of countries yet to join the BWC – a total of 10 African countries have not yet joined, although four of them have signed the Convention (CAR, Egypt, Somalia and Tanzania).

The BWC plays a fundamental role in collective security and serves as an internationally recognized forum for cooperation against the threats posed by biological weapons. Moreover, the BWC also supports the development of the peaceful uses of biological science and technology and contributes to strengthening national public health, veterinary, agricultural and emergency-response capacities. Again, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma recognized this in 2015 when she said that "the Convention's national implementation measures strengthen public health, particularly those relating to training and capacity building, improving bio-safety and bio-security, and enhancing capacities for surveillance and detection of disease outbreaks." She also stressed that "these measures will contribute to the improvement of the response to disease outbreaks."

You may be wondering whether there are onerous financial and resource implications of joining the BWC. I am happy to be able to tell you that this is not the case. The Convention runs on a minimal budget which this year is only USD 1.1 million. Contributions are based on the UN scale of assessments and most African countries pay tens or, at the most, hundreds of USD per year. In fact, over half of the 178 States Parties pay less than USD 100 per year. The same is true for other obligations – States Parties are required to submit annual confidence-building measure reports, but for countries without sophisticated biotech industries the reporting requirements are minimal. As you will discuss during this workshop, the BWC also requires its prohibitions to be implemented at the national level, something which can be more time-consuming but which contributes to making States Parties safer by strengthening their national biosecurity.

Finally, allow me to also point out that assistance is available to help your governments with implementation of the Convention's obligations. Other States Parties, as well as my team here in Geneva and our Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa in Lomé, Togo, stand ready to assist States Parties in drafting national legislation and to advise on any other aspects of national implementation. Moreover, Member States have established a sponsorship programme in order to enable the participation of national experts from developing countries in official BWC meetings and thereby contribute to building national capacities. Most significantly at the moment, we are implementing a programme from the European Union in support of the BWC. Under this programme, we can conduct in-country visits upon request to States interested in joining the BWC. During these visits, we can engage with domestic decision-makers and other stakeholders, including

parliamentarians, with a view to raising awareness about the BWC and explain in more detail the benefits of joining the Convention.

I would like to conclude with a plea to the legislators for your support: you can play a crucial role in advocating for the ratification and implementation of the BWC. We have seen this in the recent processes in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia and I would like to thank those involved for their efforts. I would therefore like to urge you all to become strong advocates for encouraging your national governments to join the BWC at the earliest possible opportunity. By working together and promoting the noble goals and universality of the Biological Weapons Convention, we can make this world a safer place.

I wish you every success in your meeting.