

**PRESENTATION BY MR. PETER BARCROFT, DIRECTOR, PGA**

Mr. Speaker

Members of Parliament

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Peter Barcroft and I am the Director of the Peace & Democracy Programme of PGA.

At the outset, and on behalf of the PGA Secretariat, please allow me to express our sincere and deep appreciation to the Parliament of Sierra Leone for so kindly hosting us here and to all of you for finding time in your busy schedules to participate in this Workshop over the next 2 days.

It would be remiss of me if I did not also mention the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Development of Canada and Global Affairs Canada who are supporting the holding of this Workshop.

PGA greatly values its partnership with the Government of Canada in this project.

It has been nearly 10 years since last I was here in the Parliament in Freetown so please allow me at the outset to say how pleased I am to be here once again.

I must say that it is also a great pleasure to see so many familiar faces here today and my colleagues and I look forward to meeting and talking with you all during the coming days.

I am joined here from the PGA Secretariat by my colleagues Thiago Carvahlo from our New York Office and Frederika Schweighoferova from our Office in the Hague.

As the Speaker has already mentioned, PGA has enjoyed close links with the Sierra Leone Parliament for many years now and we hope this event in Freetown will serve to strengthen still further this relationship which we so greatly value.

The current Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the European Union and Belgium and former MP, Hon. Ibrahim Sorie is a past Executive Committee Member as well as Convenor of the Peace & Democracy Programme of PGA and I am delighted to hear that he may be in a position to join us for part of our Workshop.

And Hon. Sorie has continued to be highly supportive of the work of PGA long after he has ceased to be an MP, a measure of his commitment and passion for the work of PGA.

Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai has made so many important contributions to the work of our organization down through the years I do not know where to start, including the organization of a success Workshop in the Pan African Parliament in South Africa just a few years ago.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before we have the benefit of learning more about the importance of the Biological Weapons Convention from you all and some experts from the international community, I am going to take up just a bit of your time to highlight why we have brought you here and what we hope will come out of this event.

As the Speaker has already outlined, the BWC is a treaty that was the first Disarmament Treaty to outlaw a whole category of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Although it is a treaty that was adopted 45 years ago and entered into force 42 years ago, it is one that has generated renewed interest and urgency in recent years, on account of clear evidence emerging that Non State Groups, including Boko Haram, Al Shabab and ISIS are all actively seeking to obtain and – we must assume – use these terrible weapons

As Parliamentarians, what is it that you can do to push back against this tide of terrible threats and risks?

I am glad to inform you that the pathway is, in fact, a very clear one.

International treaties, especially once they have been ratified and properly implemented into domestic law, serve as a crucial bulwark and first line of legislative defence in addressing national, regional and global concerns.

The Biological Weapons Convention is no exception to this Rule. By joining this treaty and by implementing and enforcing it, the capacity and likelihood of Non State Actors being able to get their hands on such weapons can be greatly diminished.

The first step is to ratify and become a State Party to the BWC.

Many of you come from countries that have already taken this step, including some very recently, such as Liberia and Guinea.

But some of you come from countries that have not yet done so.

So we sincerely hope that our friends from Namibia, Tanzania, Somalia, Chad and Central African Republic will leave Freetown with a much greater understanding of the importance and, indeed, urgency surrounding the need for your respective countries to become party to this Treaty and that you will promptly advocate for this step to be taken with the relevant Government Ministries as well as raising the matter in Parliament.

Ratification, however, is only a first step – even if a very important one and from which everything else must flow.

One of the greatest challenges that arises in connection with international treaties is that many countries are swift to join them, but unfortunately the process of effective and robust implementation of these treaties into domestic law can often be neglected or inadequately taken care of.

This is also true for the Biological Weapons Convention.

So for our friends from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria present with us here today, all of who are already State Parties to the BWC, there is a responsibility to find out what is the current status of implementing legislation in your respective countries and also to ensure that it is up to date.

Do your laws adequately criminalize any attempts to acquire, use, manufacture, stockpile or develop Biological weapons, for example?

This is a very good place to start.

In the folders you have in front of you, we have included copies of the BWC as well as other international instruments which seek to prevent the proliferation of WMD to Non State Groups.

We hope you will find them useful upon your return home and we will also send you electronic copies later this week to help you promote their importance with your colleagues in parliament and government.

What is PGA's responsibility in all of this?

Quite simply it is to help you in any way we can to move forward the ratification and implementation processes surrounding the BWC, whatever the case may be, in your respective countries.

How are we going to do this?

The first step is that we are going together to adopt a Plan of Action at the end of this Workshop setting out a number of steps that you can take to promote ratification and implementation of the BWC in your respective countries, as appropriate.

This is simply a 'menu' of options and we leave it to each of you to decide what steps you believe you can most effectively take, from those set out in the Plan of Action.

Secondly, in the weeks and months ahead, we very much hope that you will stay in contact with us and feel free to ask us for advice of any kind so that you can make the necessary progress.

In this regard, we will be pleased to share with you sample legislation that you can consider introducing in your respective parliaments in order to give full effect to the BWC in your domestic law.

We can also assist with drafting letters, suggesting content to key decision makers – this is of particular importance when it comes to promoting ratification of the Treaty.

And, of course, it is perfectly possible to move forward with legislation criminalizing Biological Weapons manufacture, usage and development, even while the matter of ratification of the BWC itself may still be pending.

Indeed, such an initiative can sometimes help to smooth the path and accelerate the process allowing the Government to subsequently join the Treaty itself.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have already taken up too much time.

Let me conclude by saying that I hope you will not see this Workshop as a Conclusion!

This Workshop is – as the Hon. Speaker remarked – a Beginning – not an End.

And I hope you will see us in the PGA Secretariat as your close partners in this process.

What a wonderful legacy of this Workshop it would be if, six or even 9 or 12 months from now, we could all look back and be able to point to a few more ratifications of the BWC that took place that came about because of the participation here of MPs from countries that are not yet States Parties.

Another very important legacy would be for us to be able to point to important progress made in introducing, revising or updating legislation to give effect to the BWC in your respective countries.

The role of Parliamentarians in promoting global security is indisputable.

By promoting ratification and implementation of the BWC, you can all make an extraordinary contribution to making your country, your region – and the world – a much safer place.

I thank you very much.

***Peter A. Barcroft***

*Director of Peace & Democracy Programme*  
Parliamentarians for Global Action