

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR WADE MARK, CHAIRPERSON OF PGA NATIONAL GROUP, PARLIAMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

***Honourable Speakers of the Parliaments of Jamaica, Guyana, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines and Saint Lucia***

***Honourable President of the Senate of Antigua and Barbuda***

***Members of Parliament from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Grenada and Suriname***

***My fellow Members of Parliament from Trinidad and Tobago***

***High Commissioners from Canada and the United Kingdom***

***Head of Delegation of the European Union***

***Representatives from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Canada***

***Distinguished Representatives from the Caribbean Community, The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean***

***Distinguished Representatives from the United Nations in Geneva and New York***

It is a particular Honor and Pleasure for me to warmly welcome you all to this Regional Parliamentary Workshop in Port of Spain and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

For those of you for whom this is your first time in our beautiful country, I hope it will be the first of many more

For those of you who are returning once again, I hope you will find your reasons for doing so remain intact!

Please allow me also to sincerely thank the Government of Canada for their support of the holding of this Workshop.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We live in a time of unprecedented national, regional and global uncertainty.

We are confronted by threats that are no longer isolated, but continue to escalate seemingly every year

Many of these threats are very different in nature – climate change, terrorism, Conventional arms and Weapons of Mass Destruction – to name but a few.

Regrettably for all of us, the world has simultaneously become a place where we can no longer aspire to address one at a time

Those advances in science and technology which have brought extraordinary advances and progress to us all have, at the same time, resulted in so many of these challenges becoming inextricably linked.

Much as we might wish to or prefer, it is no longer possible to deal with these issues in isolation, in a compartmentalized manner.

The problems caused by new challenges has also been exacerbated by the fact that new 'players' can be behind these problems in a way which would have seemed quite inconceivable 20 years ago.

Non State Actors now have terrifyingly easy access to know-how and data in connection with some of the most terrifying weapons known to humanity

Previous strategies aimed at addressing these threats have had to be re-visited - and re-looked at in a fundamentally different way as a result of this new reality.

And easy solutions are not easy to come by.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Here in the Caribbean region, we also confront many of these challenges at the same time – climate change is becoming an increasingly acute – and obvious – concern for so many of our island states

Sadly, we still also continue to wrestle with alarming levels of gun-related violence in so many of our countries as well – this seems to be a battle that is far from over and where fresh and innovative thinking is needed more than ever

While it may be less apparent from one day to the next, we must nevertheless remain from any complacency when it comes to certain other threats.

Implementing international treaties and instruments that seeking to dramatically mitigate the threat of usage of Weapons of Mass Destruction is no less a priority – and no less urgent – therefore, than simultaneously seeking to take on the other global scourges that I have just mentioned.

One or more of these threats can strike at any given time.

A holistic approach, therefore, is not only desirable – it is a basic – and urgent – necessity.

We simply cannot afford to seek to address one of these challenges in isolation – leaving one or more dangerously neglected.

Our approach to dealing with global threats and problems must reflect the innately intertwined world in which we all live today.

Just because we do not see with our own eyes the consequences of a threat, does not in any way make it any less serious, urgent or real.

What once may have seem as pure science fiction – is now accepted fact.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The subject matter of our Workshop is the Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention as well as Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540, addressing the threat of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Here in the Caribbean region, the majority of our countries have signed and ratified the Biological Weapons Convention.

However, implementation of this vital international treaty remains uneven.

We will have the benefit of hearing from a number of highly regarded international experts – today and tomorrow – insofar as to how we can do more – as Parliamentarians – to improve implementation of this treaty.

As is the case for any international treaty – there is no point in joining it, if one does not fully implement it subsequently as well.

On a more personal note, I was privileged to be part of a PGA Delegation to Port-au-Prince, Haiti together with Senator Julio Cesar Valentin – who I am delighted also to see here today.

I wish to take this opportunity once again to convey to our good friend from Haiti – Hon. Caleb Desarameaux – also among us – that he and his colleagues in the National Assembly can continue to rely upon our strong support as they move forward towards conclusion of the ratification of the BWC in your country.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 of 2004 is not an international treaty.

However, as a binding UN Security Council Resolution adopted under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, it imposes obligations on all UN Member States, including our own, to take steps to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction to Non State Actors, including terrorist organizations.

While none of our countries may possess WMD and never intend to do so, nevertheless, a number of our countries possess what are called dual use items which, if not properly regulated – can fall into the wrong hands and be used and or exported to be used in the manufacture of WMD.

Similarly, in some of our national territories, we have scientific, government or military-connected laboratories which may hold dangerous pathogens and viruses which must be properly secured

For this reason, UNSCR 1540 is of relevance – and extreme importance – to all countries worldwide.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

PGA is one of those organizations which places a particular premium on action, not words.

An important legacy of this Workshop will be the initiatives that you may see fit to take upon return to your respective Parliaments after our Workshop here in Port of Spain has conclusion.

To facilitate you in this task, we will work up a Plan of Action to share with you tomorrow.

As Members of Parliament, and as one myself, we recognize that you are very busy people with many competing demands on your time.

However, it is our sincere hope that you will still be able to raise at least some of the points that have been discussed at this Workshop with relevant colleagues in the months ahead.

Ratification without implementation is an empty exercise.

Similarly, the holding of Workshops, without any meaningful follow-up steps being taken – I think we can all agree – is something we should ensure does not take place.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you once again to Port of Spain and wish us all a very successful Workshop.

Thank you.