



# Introduction to the Biological Weapons Convention

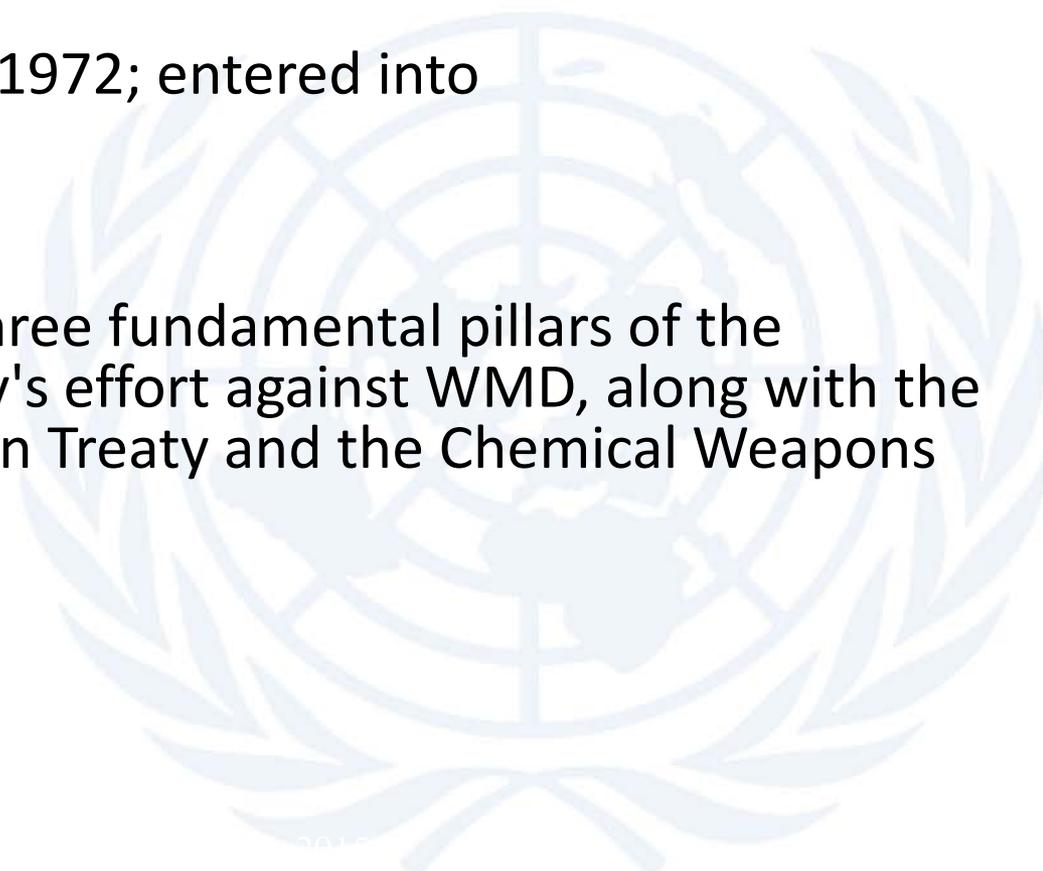
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# BWC Facts and Figures

- Full name: *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction*
- *BTWC or BWC*
- Opened for signature in 1972; entered into force in 1975
- The BWC is one of the three fundamental pillars of the international community's effort against WMD, along with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention



# What is the Biological Weapons Convention all about?

prohibits **development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, retention or transfer of BWs**

- First multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of WMD
- Cornerstone of multilateral disarmament regime
- Non-discriminatory in nature
- Unlimited duration
- Open to any state



**182 States Parties**

**5 Signatories**

**10 States not party**





# New States Parties 2012-2018

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Marshall Islands	Cameroon	Myanmar	Mauritania	Côte d'Ivoire	Samoa	State of Palestine
	Nauru		Andorra	Angola		Niue
	Guyana			Liberia		Central African Republic
	Malawi			Nepal		
				Guinea		



# BWC Main provisions

- completely prohibits any acquisition or retention of biological or toxin weapons; no exceptions
- prohibits assisting or encouraging others to acquire BW
- requires national implementation measures
- peaceful uses of biological science and technology to be protected and encouraged



# And just what is a biological weapon?

“(1) Microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes;

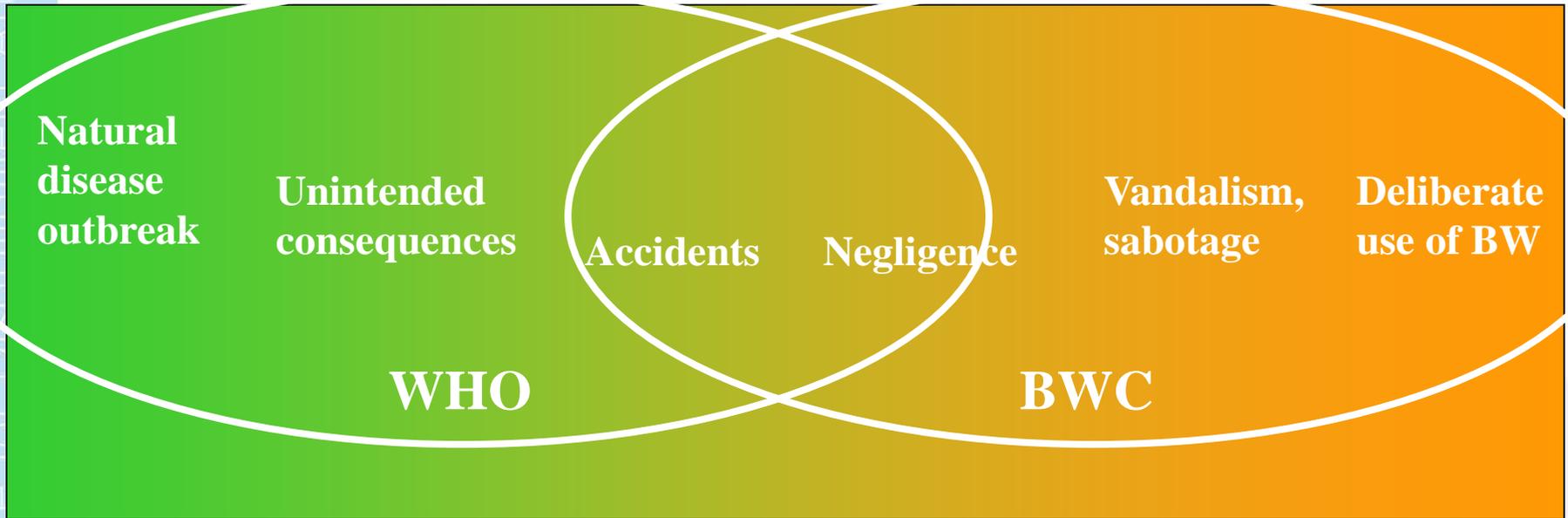
(2) Weapons, equipment or means of delivery designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict.”

- from Article I of the BWC

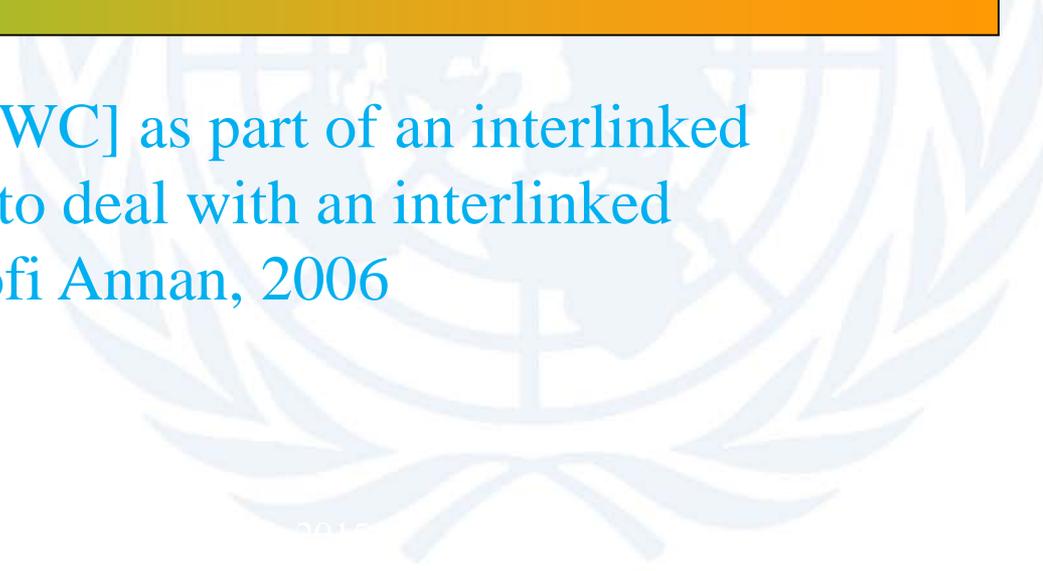




# The Spectrum of Biological Risk

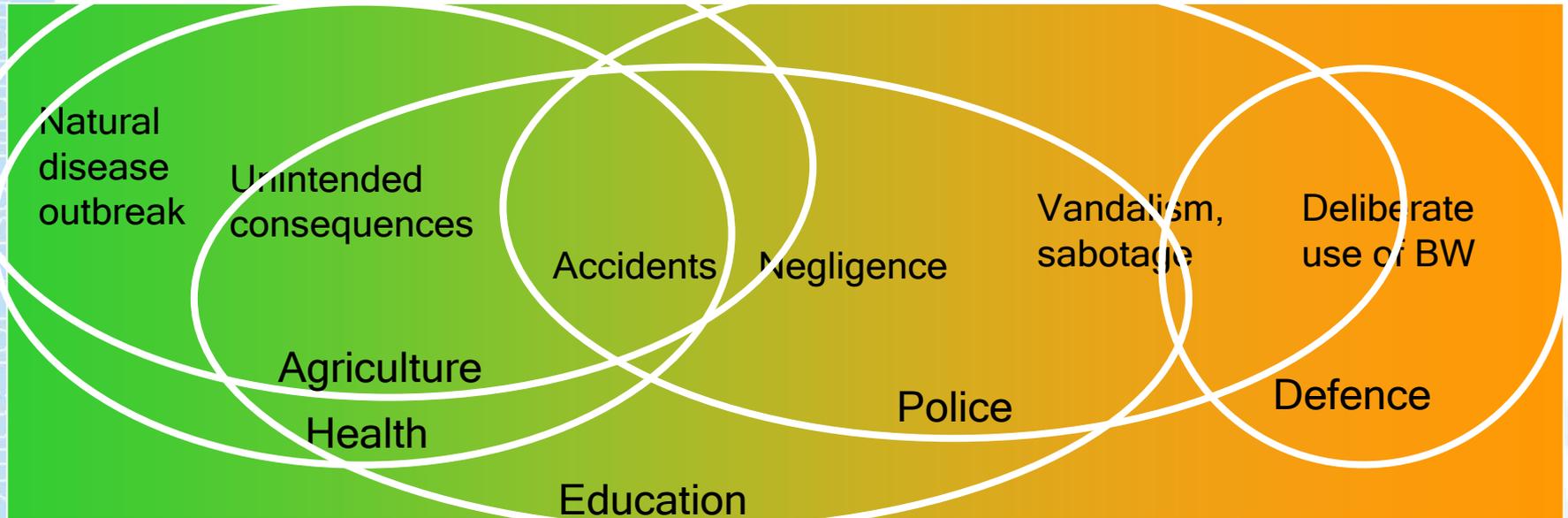


“We must look at [the BWC] as part of an interlinked array of tools, designed to deal with an interlinked array of problems” – Kofi Annan, 2006





# THE SPECTRUM OF BIOLOGICAL RISK – NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE



Growing need for coordination and cooperation among government agencies





## *Parliamentarians: Key role*

Strong influence on decision makers and impact on every key process of the treaty:

- Prior to accession/ratification: universalization efforts
- After accession / ratification: national implementation efforts

**Parliamentarians played key role in the recent progresses made on universalization activities**

# Why is the BWC important to all of us?

- Biological weapons can be used not only to attack **humans**, but also **livestock** and **crops**
- They can be **deadly** and highly **contagious**
- **Impact beyond security considerations** (health, food security, tourism, mass media, social well being)
- Diseases caused by such weapons would not confine themselves to national borders and could **spread rapidly** around the world
- 2014/2016 Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa:
  - **Lack of preparedness** to respond to larger scale disease outbreaks
  - Highlighted the potentially dramatic consequences through the deliberate release of biological agents or toxins by state or non-state actors
  - Not only tragic loss of lives, but also devastating **economic consequences**



**All states are potentially at risk,  
and all benefit from joining the BWC**





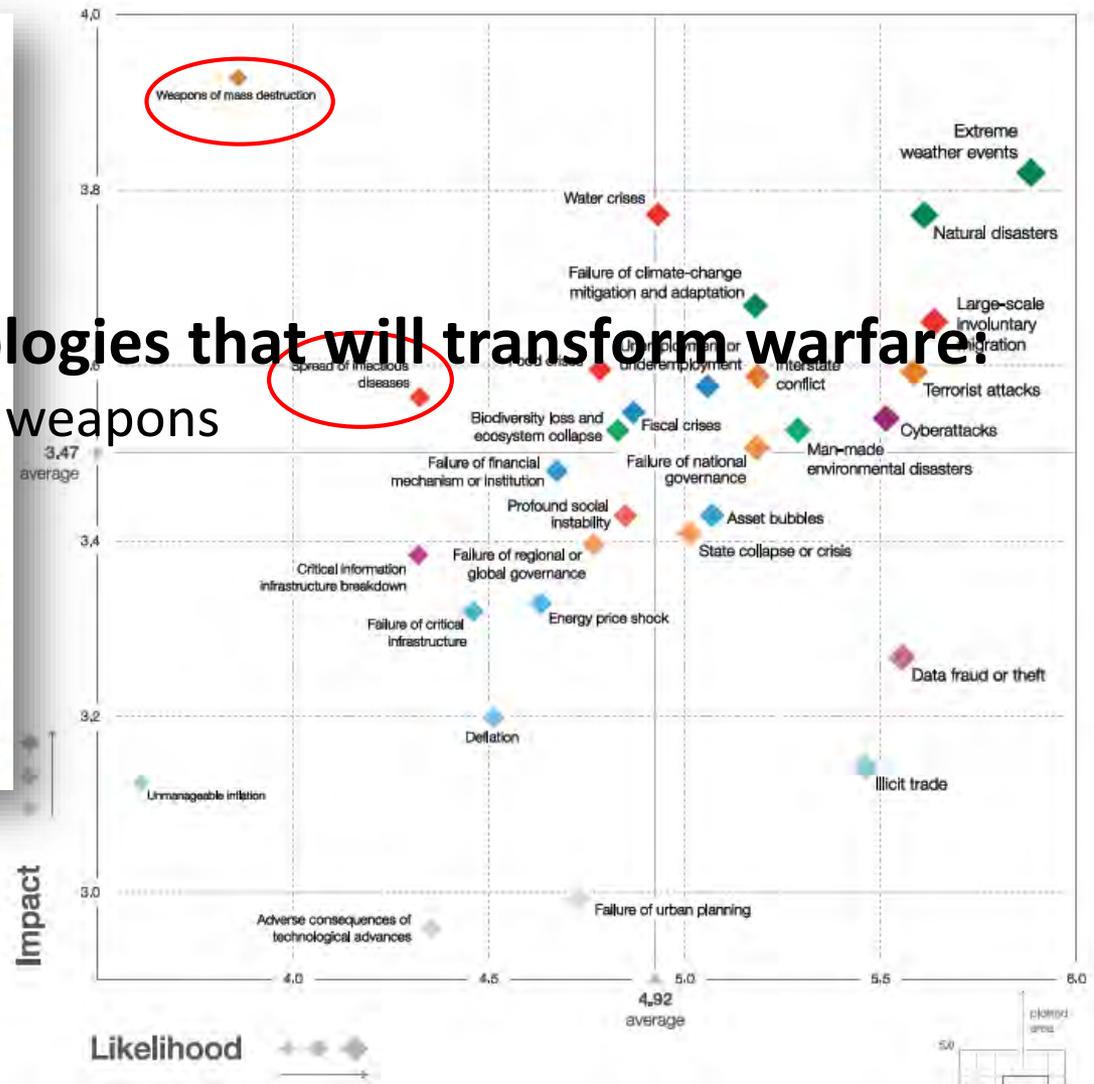
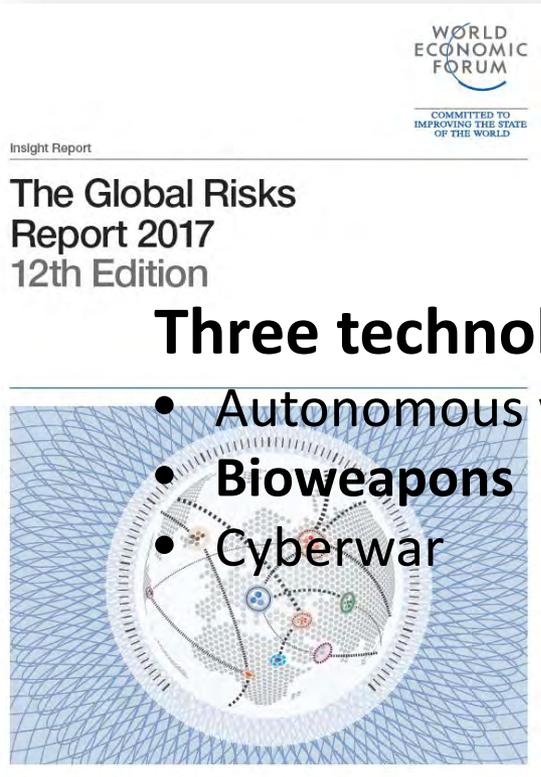
“I view the **threat of deadly pandemics** right up there with nuclear war and climate change. Getting ready for a global pandemic is every bit **as important as nuclear deterrence and avoiding a climate catastrophe**. [...] Whether it occurs by a quirk of nature or at the hand of a terrorist, epidemiologists say a **fast-moving airborne pathogen could kill more than 30 million people in less than a year**. And they say there is a **reasonable probability** the world will experience such an outbreak in the next 10-15 years.”

Bill Gates



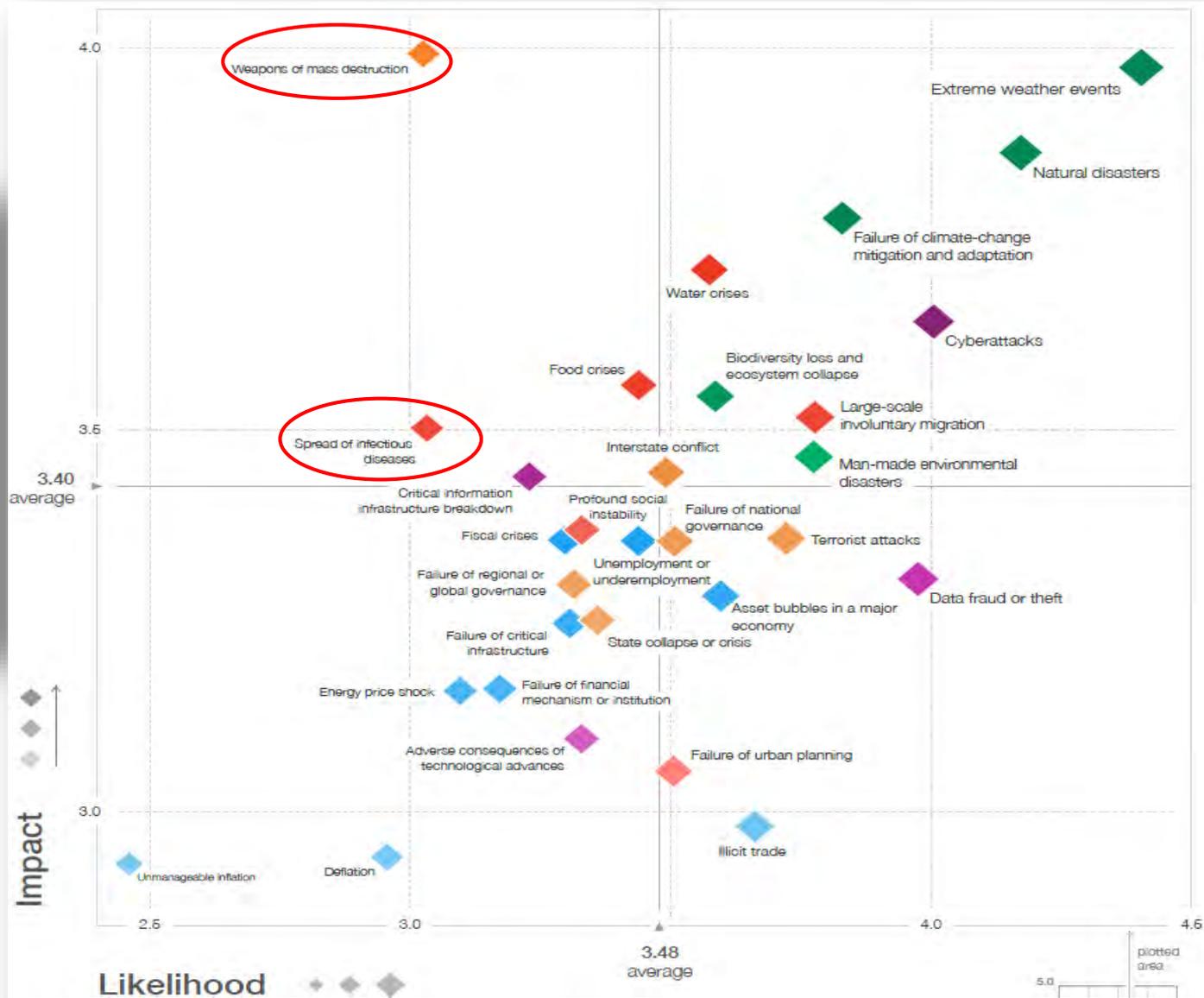


# Global Risks Report 2017





# Global Risks Report 2018



# What is the threat posed by BWs?

- Mass casualty BW attacks: tacit knowledge, access to state-run/supported programmes
- Growing concerns that non-state actors, including terrorist groups, may obtain and use biological weapons
- Terrorist attacks with BWs: more likely than state use, yet probably limited in actual casualties (however high psychological and societal impact)
- Need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach - Close cooperation between the security, scientific, public health and agricultural sectors, industry, academia and civil society is required to take place at the national, regional and international levels



**BWC is the sole multilateral forum in which all aspects surrounding biological weapons can be discussed and addressed in a holistic manner**





# What is the impact of S&T?

## Advances in life sciences occur at an unprecedented pace

- Ever improving ICT capabilities, including new methods of (virtual) scientific collaboration including information sharing
- Effects of globalization - easier access to information, technology and equipment
- Convergence of the physical, digital, and bio-disciplines - impacting all disciplines, economies and industries



## Biotechnology

- Increasingly important sector in global industry - major driver of economic growth

## S&T Review – IAP Report (2015)

- The global ability to detect and treat disease has been enhanced
- Recent advances have also facilitated the development of biological weapons
- Technological barriers to acquiring and using a biological weapon have been significantly eroded

**The BWC is a «old» Treaty, dealing with modern threats**

**Advances in S&T bring unparalleled benefits, however come also with inherent risks - need for pay continuing attention to S&T trends**

# BWC – Strengths and weaknesses

- **Strengths:**

- Clear, comprehensive ban: no exceptions, few loopholes
- Strong international norm, never publicly challenged
- Futureproof (so far...)



- **Weaknesses:**

- No organisation or implementing body
- No in-built verification mechanism
- No systematic assessment of needs or provision of assistance





# Why Join the BWC?

## Reinforce Commitment & *Strengthen Norms*

- **Fundamental role in collective security, and not only national security**
- **Need to strengthen norm against BWs and make it universal**
- **Joining BWC will help meeting requirements of UNSCR 1540 Op. 8 calls upon all States**
- **BWC as a Forum for dialogue and cooperation in meeting intl. security obligations**





# Assistance is available in implementing the BWC

## *Development and Capacity Building*

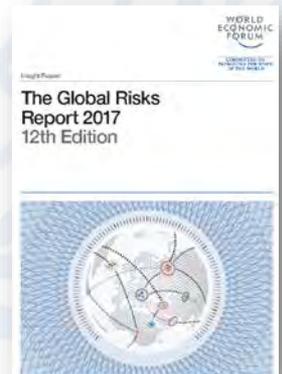
- **Forum for coordination and strengthening natl. preparedness and response capacities against bio threats**
  - ✓ Relates directly to public health, veterinary and agricultural emergency response capacities
  - ✓ Positive security guarantees under Article VII
- **Socio-economic dimension**
  - ✓ Right to participate in the fullest possible exchange of information, equipment, and materials for peaceful purposes
  - ✓ To contribute to the advancement and application of the life sciences
- **Benefit from capacity development programmes**
  - ✓ Bi- and multilateral assistance available
  - ✓ Sponsorship programme



# Key Challenges affecting the BWC

- Deep divisions among States Parties over the way ahead
- Lack of a coordinated policy and response capabilities at the global level for responding to the deliberate use of biological weapons. Hence the importance of national measures.
- Rapid developments in life sciences

**National implementation is crucial in this context**





# Conclusions

- Threat posed by biological weapons is real
- BWC key pillar of multilateral security architecture
- Strong norm against BWs established over the years, never publicly challenged
- Threat posed by biological weapons is real
- No organisation or implementing body
- No verification regime - disparities in national implementation
- Need to universalize the Convention
- Rapid advances in life sciences have implications on BWC
- Importance of monitoring S&T developments





# For more information ...

**[www.unog.ch/bwc](http://www.unog.ch/bwc)**

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