

Your Excellencies, Honorable Members of Parliament  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured and very pleased to be here and to  
welcome you to Banjul.

At the outset, please allow me to express sincere  
appreciation to the Hon. Speaker of the National  
Assembly of The Gambia for the wonderful Opening  
session we had this morning.

I also wish to sincerely thank The Clerk of the National  
Assembly and all his staff for all their help in organizing  
this Workshop.

Many hands make light work and many hands are  
needed indeed to organize a Workshop on this scale.

I must say also that this is the first time that PGA has  
organized any activity in The Gambia.

It is my sincere hope that this Workshop will be just the  
beginning of a long and close relationship between PGA  
and the National Assembly.

I believe we are off to a very strong start.

Please allow me also just a few moments to express my sincere gratitude also to the Foreign Ministry of Norway for their financial support of this Workshop.

This is also the first time that PGA has received support from the Government of Norway and we are very much looking forward to a long and results-driven relationship with them.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I also wish to thank all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in this Workshop.

I hope that you will have a very positive experience with PGA.

It is always a pleasure to see some familiar faces and we are very pleased to welcome some Members of Parliament who are joining us for the first time.

The subject matter of our Workshop is Promoting the Role of Women Parliamentarians in Africa in Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Today and tomorrow you will hear from a number of experts in this subject matter and we especially look

forward to hearing your own presentations on this important subject.

We have also a number of interactive dialogue sessions after our Panel discussions which I hope you will all take advantage of to raise any questions that you may have.

My intention today is simply to provide you with some general observations which I hope will facilitate and guide the proceedings of our Workshop.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The threats posed to humanity by weapons of mass destruction have never been more serious than they are today.

We live in a deeply troubled and uncertain world.

These growing threats, most unfortunately, have been made worse by the fact that access to such weapons has become easier, not harder in recent years.

This, in turn, has led to a scenario where, for the first time, we are now seeing Non State Actors, including terrorist organizations seeking to develop, acquire, manufacture and use these terrible weapons.

They can be nuclear, chemical , biological or radiological. Our Workshop will focus on one Convention of particular importance – the Biological Weapons Convention.

Although adopted 47 years ago, because of these new and growing threats, this Treaty has been ratified by over 10 countries in just the past 8 years.

PGA is working with a number of its Members worldwide to achieve the same result, as well as to promote implementation of this treaty.

In parallel, and over the past 2 years, PGA has been actively raising awareness among its global membership about United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 was adopted in 2004 as a first substantial effort by the international community to seek to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to Non State Actors, including organized criminals and terrorist organizations.

It requires all UN Member States to take steps that can help to prevent this spread of such terrible weapons to Non State Actors

Although it is not a Convention, it is binding on all UN Member States as it was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Now, many of you will be thinking, my country does not have any Weapons of Mass Destruction and has no intention of ever possessing, let alone using them.

This is undoubtedly true.

However, UNSCR 1540 is still very relevant because in many countries where no Weapons of Mass Destruction exist, nevertheless certain defense or military or scientific products may be made or used which can potentially also be mis-used and or combined with other products to make Weapons of Mass Destruction.

In addition, in some of your countries, Government or university laboratories may exist which contain dangerous chemicals or biological toxins which may not be adequately secured.

By joining relevant international treaties and implementing relevant UN resolutions, assistance is available to address these risks.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The role of Parliamentarians in promoting ratification and implementation of international treaties and resolutions is well established.

Parliamentarians are both advocates and law-makers

In addition, a number of these treaties and international resolutions specifically recognize the central role played by Parliamentarians in the implementation of these treaties and resolutions.

You will hear more about this later today from the Representatives from the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention as well as from the UN Security Council Committee 1540 that we are fortunate also to have with us for this Workshop.

I might add that a number of you, as PGA Members, have already taken very important steps.

In so doing, you have made very important contributions not just to national, but also regional and international peace and security.

I sincerely hope that for those of you that may be newer to PGA, that these actions will help to inspire you to take similar steps

In the folders that we have sent you, you will find copies of the relevant treaties and resolutions and we shall send you electronic versions after the conclusion of the Workshop.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Weapons of Mass Destruction are equal opportunity  
Weapons

They kill or gravely harm everyone.

There are no exceptions.

It is for this reason that everyone that is in a position to address this threat must be enabled to do so.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 specifically recognized the vital importance of engaging Women more vigorously in promoting international peace and security.

The UN Secretary General has issued a number of reports on the importance of engaging Women more fully in facing these devastating challenges

Within PGA, it is particularly encouraging that a large number of our Members who are engaging in this area

are Women Parliamentarians – and with notable success as well.

Excluding women from decision making processes in this arena makes it more difficult, not easier to effectively find solutions to these profound risks to all of humanity.

It must also be recalled that women can suffer in ways that men do not, in the event of Weapons of Mass Destruction attacks, be they biological, chemical or nuclear.

The legacy of the suffering of children born in Hiroshima after the nuclear bomb will never be forgotten.

Similarly chemical or biological attacks affect not just women, but also child that may not be born for years later.

The overall global health and security dimension must also not be overlooked.

Women Legislators frequently have a stronger interest and understanding of health and development issues than their male counterparts.



This is just one more reason why we hope that this Workshop will inspire many of you to take vitally needed steps upon return to your respective Parliaments

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the conclusion of this Workshop, you will adopt a Plan of Action which will contain a number of steps that you may wish to consider taking in the coming months

I am glad to inform you that next year, we will have a follow-up Workshop to this event in Tanzania.

This will be a unique opportunity to share with all your colleagues here information about whatever steps you may be able to take between now and then.

I look forward to hearing your presentations, to answering any questions you may have – but most important of all – to staying in contact with you all in the coming months.

Thank you.

