

Good Afternoon and Good Morning to everyone.

My name is Peter Barcroft and I am the Director of PGA's International Peace and Security Program.

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this Inaugural Webinar that we are organizing today promoting Nuclear and Radiological Security in Africa.

This is the first in a series of different Regional Webinars that we will be organizing during the course of the next 12 months, kindly supported by The Weapons Threat Reduction Program of Global Affairs Canada.

While it is always our preference to organize such activities on the ground, meeting with you all in person, we must wait only a bit longer before this once again becomes possible to do.

We certainly look forward to that time.

However the reason why we are compelled to organize our activities on a remote basis for the time being is also the same reason why it is important for us to remain in contact.

Covid 19 has had, and continues to have a devastating impact on so many of our lives. The final human and economic toll of this pandemic will be far beyond any of us could ever imagine.

As always, therefore, it is extremely important for us to learn from this experience, understand what and why went wrong and, most importantly of all, take steps to prevent it happening again.

This pandemic has also been a wake-up call to all of us on a more general level. The lack of preparedness for it that has been so painfully obvious is a cause for deep concern also on other fronts.

If we have not been adequately prepared for this pandemic – what else is it that we are not adequately prepared for?

What other risks are there – out there – that – at least up until now – we have not fully recognized how real they are.

Covid-19 is a disease and disease can be weaponized.

The next time we may experience a pandemic, it may have been deliberately unleashed on us by Non State Actors, or terrorist organizations as we more commonly describe them.

This is a clear and present danger and has been for some years now. A number of you, as PGA Members, have recognized this and engaged in substantial and highly effective advocacy in encouraging your respective Governments to join the Biological Weapons Convention as well as improved implementation of UN Security Council Resolution on the Prevention of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

For the reality is, that these same terrorist organizations are not confined in their interest to weaponizing disease.

Clear evidence has accumulated in recent years of their interest in obtaining, manufacturing and using other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

These include Nuclear and Radiological Weapons.

And this is why we are here today!

I am very pleased that we have representatives from both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as well as the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) who will share with us some more information about the international treaties which, if more universally ratified and implemented, can make significant steps in reducing the risks of terrorist organizations getting hold of such weapons or the material needed to manufacture them.

I hope that at least some of you will also take advantage of this opportunity to ask questions or seek clarifications that you may need.

I am equally pleased to see that a number of Representatives from relevant Government Ministries as well as from several national nuclear and radiological agencies have also been able to join us today.

We value your expertise and welcome your comments and observations also, in particular in terms of engaging further with Parliamentarians in this endeavor.

We will have several time slots to allow for interactive dialogue among all of us.

Before I turn over to our distinguished Panelists today, let me quickly say a few words about our overall objectives moving forward, both coming out of this Webinar as well as other subsequent regional ones that we will organize in the next 10 months.

It is our sincere hope that through participation in this Webinar and in bilateral follow-up contact with us afterwards, you will be better able and willing to encourage your respective Governments to take steps to ratify and implement the treaties in question. We are always at your disposal, should you have any questions.

Another key objective of this project is to promote greater engagement by female Parliamentarians in this arena.

Many of you are already very familiar with the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and that it is not only a high priority for PGA, but also for many Governments and the international community at large.

Women are disproportionately impacted by WMD in many ways.

For this reason, it all the more important that we collectively make greater efforts to engage more female Parliamentarians in this arena.

Within PGA, I am pleased to report, we have already had some degree of success.

Indeed, some of our key successes in promoting ratification and implementation of the BWC and UNSCR 1540 have come about directly as a result of our female Members in certain African States.

But we hope that their actions and success can continue to inspire others to follow others in their steps.

During the course of this Webinar, PGA shall also provide you with a brief overview of a number of suggested 'Action Points' for you to consider taking in the weeks and months ahead.

That's all from me for now.

Let me now invite our distinguished panelists to take the virtual floor!

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