



Parliamentarians for Global Action
Parlamentarios para la Acción Global
Action Mondiale des Parlementaires
برلمانيون من أجل التحرك العالمي

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PGA**

PGA REGIONAL AFRICAN WORKSHOP TO PROMOTE BIOLOGICAL SECURITY

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen

I hope you are all settling in well and now have some sense at least of the overall general goals of this Regional Workshop, taking into account also the excellent presentations we have already heard from Minister Pindi Chana, Hon. Jasson Rweikiza and High Commissioner O'Donnell, for which we are most grateful.

My task at this early stage in our proceedings is to delve into a bit more detail as to what is the more precise scope and purpose of our event.

Before I do so, and with your indulgence, I would like to make a few more general comments.

This is the first Regional in-person Workshop that we in PGA have been able to organize in more than two years.

So I think today, in a small way, is a vote of confidence for the future.

What a joy it is not to have to peer into a computer screen – for the first time in a long time!

PGA is profoundly grateful to our Tanzanian hosts, Minister Chana as well as Hon. Rweikiza for their crucial help.

I am sure I do not need to tell you how much work goes on behind the scenes in making this a reality.

We in PGA are equally grateful to the Government of Canada, and its Weapons Threat Reduction Program, for their steadfast support of our work and for funding this Regional Workshop.

...Including throughout the past 2 years when it has been difficult for us to do more, speaks volumes about Canada's commitment to regional and international peace and security.

But most of all, we are grateful to all of you, for taking that extra trouble to come and be here today.

I believe this is also a measure of your own commitment to the causes we all share.

The Covid-19 pandemic has devastated our villages, our towns, our cities, our communities and our families.

Many millions have died, many more have lost their loved ones and their livelihoods.

I am sure that many of you have been also directly and indirectly affected, either personally or in your parliamentary work.

It is also unwise for any of us to think that it may be over, even if things have certainly improved.

Entrenched global inequalities being what they are, we probably still have some way to go.

Unrelated events, including in the Ukraine, unavoidably distract decision maker attention during these key times as well.

So this brings me to the scope, the objective, the purpose of our event today.

As many of you already well understand, the theme of our Workshop correlates very closely with this global tragedy through which we have all been living these past few years.

Promoting biological security, including at the interface with public health has never been more important and urgent than it is today.

The Covid-19 pandemic in all likelihood came about as a result of a negligent or natural act.

Regrettably, however, the devastation that it has caused has opened the eyes of terrorists and terrorist organizations worldwide, Non State Actors as they are also called, to the potential of disease to wreak havoc and mayhem in an unprepared world.

These threats have always been there. This is why PGA IPSP has been promoting implementation of international biological security frameworks for nearly 7 years now.

In front of you you have copies of two of these instruments, the Biological Weapons Convention as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

We will hear more about both these Instruments in a presentation from Mr O'Neil Hamilton of the UNODC tomorrow morning.

The last country to ratify the BWC was Tanzania! The 183rd State, in no small part due to the extraordinary advocacy efforts of Hon. Jasson Rweikiza. That was back in 2018 and 2019. 4 months after Tanzania ratified, Covid-19 arrived on our shores....

The primary objective and purpose of this Workshop, therefore, is to raise awareness, to sensitize you more to the existence and importance of these key international instruments.

Some of you already are quite well versed in these treaties and UN resolutions.

For many of you, this is new territory and the learning curve may be a little bit steeper.

But that is why we are here. To learn, to better understand and to ask questions, make comments.

Our presentations will greatly inform the success of this event. But our questions and comments will significantly further enrich it.

As you will see from the Program, we have made provision for several opportunities to have a genuinely interactive dialogue and I hope you will take full advantage of them.

We want you to go home with your questions answered!

The secondary objective is no less important (in fact it is more important!) and is closely related to the first.

PGA is Parliamentarians for Global Action. It is not Parliamentarians for Global Discussion.

Discussion is vital and must come first.

But at the end of the day, and when we organize these Workshops, they are merely means to a more important end.

At the end of this Workshop, you will adopt a Plan of Action which will include a number of different practical, easy to implement steps that you, as Parliamentarians can take to promote biological security in your respective countries.

PGA stands where it does in the international community, not because of our events, but because what so many of our Members actually do once they have participated in them.

That is where we bring added value in the global quest for peace and security.

It is also the reason why we receive the generous support of the Government of Canada.

Our effective activism is our calling card. Without it, we are just another talk-shop, of which regrettably there are still too many in the world today.

It is important to recognize that some of you have already engaged in impactful parliamentary diplomacy on this front, while many of you are entirely new to this arena.

It is also important to acknowledge that no one size fits all here. Different considerations and realities exist in each of your countries which must be taken into account at all time when seeking to make progress.

But one thing is abundantly and unambiguously clear.

Even if in slightly different ways, you all have different steps that you can take.

It is my job and that of PGA to help identify them for you. To provide the guidance and information you need. We know how busy you are with your primary responsibilities as Members of Parliament.

So, for those of you who are new to PGA, I really hope you will see this as a beginning, not an end and that you will not hesitate to reach out to us in the coming weeks and months for any advice you may wish to seek.

Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen

In every crisis there is an opportunity – as the old saying goes.

I respectfully submit to you that this is your opportunity, not only to make your countries safer places, but also your region and, in the process, world.

Parliamentarians are both lawmakers and advocates.

There is a real opportunity now to meet the moment.

Preventing future pandemics is a tall order.

But being better ready for them, better prepared to mitigate their impact or at least to reduce the likelihood of them occurring – you can all play a decisive and catalytic role.

Some of you have already done so and we will forever salute your herculean efforts.

As I close these remarks, and if there is one goal, one objective, one purpose of this Workshop, it is to equip and to motivate **all of you** to take full advantage of all the prerogatives you possess as Parliamentarians to truly meet this moment and to make the world a safer place.

Thank you.