



**REGIONAL AFRICAN
WORKSHOP ON THE**

BIOLOGICAL SECURITY

**PARLIAMENTARY
PROMOTION OF**

**Address by Rt. Hon. Edwin Melvin SNOWE Jr, Representative of the Speaker,
ECOWAS Parliament**

Dar-Es-Salam, Tanzania,

9-10 May 2022

Honorable Representatives of the PGA Executive Committee
Honorable Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania
Honorable Chairman of PGA National Group of Tanzania
Your Excellency the High Commissioner of Canada to Tanzania
Honorable Parliamentarians Members of PGA
Mr Secretary General
Distinguished guests, our media friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. First of all, I would like to sincerely thank the authorities of PGA for the kind invitation addressed to the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, the Right Honorable (Dr.) Sidie Mohamed TUNIS, would have loved to personally take part in this workshop. Unfortunately, despite all the interest he has shown in this event, last minute circumstances did not allow him to make the trip to Dar-Es-Salam. He expresses his regrets and has asked me to convey to you his full support and wishes for full success in your deliberations.

2. The regional African parliamentary workshop in Dar-Es-Salam which brings us together today, aims to improve knowledge of the Biological Weapons Convention and its implementation by signatories and non-signatories.
3. During these two days, we will be given the opportunity to discuss the issues related to safety, security, science and technology in the field of biology. We will also examine the consequences and lessons learned from the Ebola Virus, and Corona Virus, as well as the national and regional measures necessary to respond to epidemics and biological threats. This forum will also provide us the opportunity to address some of the very relevant questions that are germane to the subject of biological security, including but not limited to the procedures for ratifying the Convention, legislative, administrative and enforcement measures at national level, as well as international assistance and cooperation within the framework of the Convention, among others.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

4. It is important to remember that two UN conventions, in 1972 and 1993, banned the use of biological and chemical weapons and required the destruction of stockpiles. The 1993 convention, which entered into force in April 1997, has been signed by 143 States. However, some states have failed to sign the convention, while others have yet to ratify the convention. However, it is equally important to note that globally, 171 states are parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, 39 of which are member states of the African Union.

The ECOWAS Parliament

5. In the ECOWAS Region, a Regulation on Biosafety was validated by the ECOWAS Commission in May 2019 in order to face the challenges relating to the use of modern biotechnologies and their potential impact on the environment, human health and animal health, socio-economic security and food security in the region. This regional biosafety regulation is the result of a collaboration between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the Permanent Interstate Committee of fight against drought in the Sahel (CILSS) to address environmental and socio-economic issues as well as biotechnology issues in the region.

6. This Regulation calls on the ECOWAS Commission to collaborate with Member States and international organizations to develop information and awareness-raising mechanisms and to contribute to the mobilization of funds for its implementation.
7. The ECOWAS Parliament, being the Representative forum of the ECOWAS Community, has adequately exercised its prerogatives on these regulations in line with its competence. As a law making institution, Parliament is accountable for the laws it make and amend. Notwithstanding the scope of its current mandate, which is limited to rendering opinion on issues of the community, it is important to note that the ECOWAS Parliament, has supported the development of robust legal framework that governs the development and management of policies in diverse areas, including those that address and promote biological security.

In terms of challenges,

8. The ECOWAS region has demonstrated its political will to adopt and operationalize a health approach for regional health security. It has set up in 1987, a sub-regional health institution, called the West African Health Organization (WAHO) with the objectives of attainment of the highest possible standard and protection of health of the peoples in the sub-region through the harmonization of the policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation for a collective and strategic combat against the health problems of the sub-region.
9. However, the issues of specialized and competent health personnel, funding and committed regional policymakers and capacity building in national institutions to improve the regional approach still remain notable challenges.
10. Moreover, understating the security challenges in ECOWAS, particularly in the Sahel region where terrorists operate at a much larger scale, the need to educate people on any possible use of biological material cannot be overemphasized.

Conclusion

11. Given the importance and the negative consequences that biological weapons whatever means used, it necessarily involves the coordination of several stakeholders from various sectors, from which it is important to have a strategic

plan in terms of prevention as a response to any biological action. That is why the ECOWAS Parliament supports regional cooperation and multilateral initiatives that are geared towards addressing the issues that no single state and region can address on its own. We look forward to leveraging on the rich resources obtained from this forum to inform our decision making processes in regards to the issue of biological security and other related issues.

Thank you for your kind attention.