

Statement
by Ambassador Yann Hwang,
Chairperson of the 2019 Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties

PGA Workshop on Promoting the Role of Women Parliamentarians in Africa in Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction – Banjul, The Gambia, 16-17 May 2019

Excellencies
Distinguished Members of Parliament
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address you on the occasion of this meeting organized by Parliamentarians for Global Action for the purpose of promoting the role of women parliamentarians in Africa in preventing the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

I commend Parliamentarians for Global Action and the National Assembly of The Gambia for organizing this Regional Workshop.

As the Chairperson of the BWC, I would like to express my thanks to PGA for their campaign to promote the universality and the implementation of the BWC, as well as the implementation of the UNSCR 1540. Support from Parliamentarians is crucial for the negotiation, implementation and sustainability of instruments such as the BWC, and I am delighted to see that this workshop will be highlighting the key role that women parliamentarians have been and will continue playing in this area.

The threat from biological weapons is real. The dramatic consequences of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa serve as a stark reminder of the threat posed to humanity by emerging communicable diseases. More than 11,000 people were killed, 28,000 infected and US\$2.2 billion in economic losses were caused in the countries most affected by the outbreak. In this context, the billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates noted “*Of all the things that could kill more than 10 million people around the world, the most likely is an epidemic stemming from either natural causes or bioterrorism*”. It is no coincidence that the recent World Economic Forum in Davos identified bio-weapons together with autonomous weapons and cyberwar as the three technologies that will transform warfare and impact both our individual and collective security.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) represents one of the fundamental pillars in the security architecture. It was the first treaty to outlaw an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Since its entry into force in 1975, a total of 182 States have joined the Convention.

Parliamentarians play a crucial role in advocating for the accession, ratification and implementation of the BWC. This regime plays a fundamental role in collective security and serves as an internationally recognized forum for cooperation against the threats posed by biological weapons. Moreover, the BWC also supports the development of the peaceful uses of biological science and technology and contributes to strengthening national public health, veterinary, agricultural and emergency-response capacities. I would therefore like to urge you all to become strong advocates for the effective implementation of this treaty.

Finally, allow me to also point out that assistance is available to help your governments with implementation of the Convention's obligations. Other States Parties, as well as the BWC Implementation Support Unit, stand ready to assist States Parties in drafting national legislation and to advise on any other aspects of national implementation. Moreover, Member States have established a sponsorship programme in order to enable the participation of national experts from developing countries in official BWC meetings and thereby contribute to building national capacities. And the European Union has adopted since January 2019 a decision in support of the BWC. Its projects are focusing on BWC universalization and implementation.

By working together and promoting the noble goals and universality of the Biological Weapons Convention, we can make this world a safer place. I will count on your support.

I wish you success in your meeting.