

**Statement by Ambassador Robert A. Wood**

**U.S. Special Representative for Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention**

**(BWC) Issues**

**March 30, 2015**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your leadership of the BWC this year.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, 40 years after its entry into force, the Biological Weapons Convention continues to be an essential element in the international community's efforts to prohibit and eliminate such weapons, the use of which the Convention's preamble so aptly states "would be repugnant to the conscience of mankind." While not yet universal, the BWC is the centerpiece of a global norm that possession and use of these weapons are unacceptable.

During these four decades, we have witnessed astounding innovations in the life sciences that represent remarkable progress. Such advances contribute to a brighter future for all people around the world and reflect both the tremendous possibilities and great success of international cooperation in this field. At the same time, with these advances technology has become more easily accessible, putting the biological weapons within reach of a much wider array of individuals and groups. President Obama has acknowledged that "we are more susceptible to

bioterrorism than ever” but pledged that, “as we take action to counter these threats, we will work together to advance our own health security and provide for the improved condition of all humanity.” The world has changed; the nature of the biological weapons threat has changed; and our approach to the Biological Weapons Convention needs to keep pace.

Allow me to address some of the main challenges to the BWC as we look toward its next 40 years. The primary objective of the United States in the BWC is to work with other States Parties to strengthen the Convention as an instrument for combatting bioweapons proliferation and terrorism. We will continue to emphasize the importance of effective national implementation of the BWC and of transparency regarding implementation as a means of assuring other States Parties about compliance with the Convention. And we will continue to be active in providing practical assistance to other States Parties that contributes to implementation and transparency.

The scientific advances and spread of technology I mentioned earlier offer incredible benefits, but they also pose thorny questions for those who seek to ensure that biological weapons will never again be used. How do we ensure that the life sciences are used for solely peaceful purposes, while still promoting their broad access to those benefits and further advancement in these fields? We know some of the answers: effective export controls, strong biosafety and biosecurity,

active outreach and awareness-raising. But these are challenging issues and require ongoing attention.

Recently, the United States and the international community have begun to grapple with a specific dual-use challenge: what we have come to call “dual use research of concern.” This is legitimate life science research that can be reasonably anticipated to provide knowledge, information, products, or technologies that could be directly misapplied to pose a significant threat with broad potential consequences to public health and safety, agricultural crops and other plants, animals, the environment, materiel, or national security. We must work to preserve the benefits of life science research, while taking steps to minimize the risk of misuse of the products of such research by monitoring and mitigating such risks throughout the research process.

In addition to banning biological weapons, BWC Article VII commits States Parties to provide assistance to any other State Party if the UN Security Council decides “that such Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention.” Since it can be difficult and time consuming to determine whether biological weapons have been used, much of what needs to be done to fulfill this provision for assistance is also necessary to prepare for and respond to outbreaks of disease that occur naturally. This, in turn, means that the work of the BWC is closely tied to global efforts to prepare for any type of public health emergency.

As the international community considers the lessons of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa for how to prepare for future health crises, now is a good time to examine and discuss what this experience of a naturally occurring epidemic might teach us about fulfilling the assistance commitments under Article VII in case a bioweapon were to be used anywhere in the world.

The United States has made addressing infectious disease threats a high priority. In 2014, we joined with 28 other nations to launch the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), an international effort to accelerate progress toward a world safe and secure from infectious disease threats. GHSA partners include over 40 nations, international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and Interpol, nongovernmental partners, and private stakeholders. The Agenda seeks to elevate efforts to:

- Reduce the likelihood of outbreaks;
- Detect outbreaks early to save lives; and
- Respond to outbreaks effectively using the full range of multisectoral resources

GHSA is a multi-sectoral initiative to strengthen our collective ability to prevent, detect and respond to disease outbreaks--whether natural, accidental, or intentional. This is an effort distinct from that of the BWC, but one that supports key aims of the Convention: the capabilities GHSA seeks to advance will make

individual countries and the international community safer from the threat of biological weapons. GHSA is also a very real example of the international cooperation BWC States Parties are committed to under Article X – a mechanism to identify needs, mobilize resources, and coordinate capacity-building efforts, guided by established international norms such as the International Health Regulations.

The fact that 173 States have joined the Convention is an extraordinary endorsement of the BWC's principles, but we seek a Convention in which all are Parties. Universal membership in the Convention would reflect a truly global consensus that biological weapons are illegitimate and that all states have a responsibility to prevent anyone from obtaining them. Let us strive to reach that lofty objective well before the next 40 years of the BWC have passed.

For the last forty years, the BWC has been essential in establishing a strong international norm against biological weapons. We must aim to make it stronger still in the years and decades ahead. Dealing with universal adherence, dual-use capabilities, increased transparency, developments in science and technology, and our collective assistance obligations will not be easy, but it is undeniably necessary. The BWC lays the foundation of our collective efforts to protect against the weaponization of biological agents, and it is critical for all countries to take practical steps to strengthen the most important tool we have in this effort.