

Substantive Extract of the Brief of the Chairman
BWC 40th Anniversary Event
30 March 2015

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to this auspicious occasion. Forty years ago, on 26 March 1975, the Biological Weapons Convention entered into force with ceremonies in London, Moscow and Washington. As we all know, the BWC was the world's first treaty to effectively prohibit an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. This year's fortieth anniversary is therefore an occasion worth commemorating.

I would like to express my thanks to the Depositary Governments of the BWC – the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America – and the Implementation Support Unit for arranging this event, and also to the United Kingdom for providing financial support.

This morning's event is intended to have a mainly historical and commemorative focus. There will also be an academic seminar this afternoon starting at 14:00 which has been arranged by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. I encourage you all to attend until the reception in the evening.

Taking a leaf from our own personal lives, an anniversary is a significant milestone. It gives an opportunity to reflect upon the past, and also to think about the future. It is also a time to be shared with friends and colleagues and I am pleased that we have many such people present today from governments, international organizations and civil society.

Geneva was the birthplace of the BWC and has hosted every BWC meeting since its birth.

[Chair proceeding further with giving the floor to Mr. Michael Moller, the Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva]

The United Nations, particularly its Office for Disarmament Affairs, has played a key role in the life of the Convention to date.

[Chair proceeding further with introducing video message from the High Representative for disarmament affairs, Ms Angela Kane]

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

As we have already heard, the BWC is an important treaty within the international architecture against weapons of mass destruction and it represents a strong norm against the weaponization of disease. The strength of the abhorrence that we as humans feel towards the use of disease as a weapon is clear in the Preamble to the Convention where such use is described as “repugnant to the conscience of mankind”. Today, 173 States have registered their support for this norm by becoming parties to the BWC, and several others are very close to doing so.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels. The negotiation and entry into force of the BWC were key moments in its life, but like any international agreement, the BWC needs "tending". Over the years, attention to the BWC has waxed and waned but without such attention there is a danger that a treaty could lose its relevance and its connection with relevant developments in the wider world.

That is why the intersessional process is important. It helps to maintain the Convention's relevance and makes sure that its States Parties tend to the BWC's implementation. It is therefore good to be having this event now in March, when the BWC is not normally in people's minds here in Geneva. While many of you are now turning your attention to the NPT Review Conference which will take place soon in New York, it is very encouraging to see you here today to spend time considering the past, present and future of the BWC. "Tending" this treaty should be an ongoing activity, not something confined to only two weeks of the year.

Over the past three years we have had good discussions about the standing agenda items – assistance and cooperation, national implementation and science and technology - and the biennial items – the CBMs and Article VII. Over these years, we have been able to reach new common understandings as reflected in the reports of the Meetings of States Parties. It is now important for us to focus on the effective action part of the mandate given to us by the Seventh Review Conference. Hopefully, the discussions today will assist us in this regard as we look forward to this year's Meeting of Experts in August and Meeting of States Parties in December.

As we all know, the BWC has three Depositary Governments to whom Article XIV of the Convention gave special responsibilities as regards to the functioning of the treaty and particularly regarding the membership of the BWC. It is gratifying that the BWC today has 173 states parties with the very recent accession by Andorra.

[Chair proceeding further with the programme of the morning, by giving the floor to the representatives of each of the Depositary States, Ambassador Khan and Dr. Caitriona McLeish]