
Excellencies, Development Partners and Ladies and Gentlemen
The Attorney General of FSM Mr. Johnson Asher and the Associate Minister for Natural Resources and Environment from FSM, Mr Lemalu Lemi Taefu.
Ni sa BULA VINAKA and a warm welcome to the Republic of Fiji!

It gives me much pleasure to officiate at this formal opening of the Regional Biological Weapons Convention Workshop here in Nadi.

Let me express my sincere gratitude to the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) for choosing to co-host such an important workshop - in conjunction with the Fijian Government, and through my Ministry - in this part of the world. I understand the main
objective of the workshop is to promote the universality of the Convention through an integrated approach and establish a platform in the region to curb and address the scourge of biological threats.

The global security situation has changed dramatically in recent years making it more unpredictable, sophisticated and challenging. It has imposed a major challenge on all fronts, which is why assistance through international agencies and more collaboration are needed to mitigate against these threats.
I hope the two-day Biological Weapons Convention workshop will provide you with more insights into the Convention and its obligations and help you to convince your respective political masters to accede to it. For the five countries under the BWC Universality programme, namely Niue, FSM, Samoa, Tuvalu and Kiribati, your participation demonstrates your governments’ commitment towards peace and security in this region.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) represents one of the fundamental pillars in multilateral disarmament as it was the first treaty to outlaw an entire
category of weapons of mass destruction since it came into force in 1975. To date, 178 States have joined the Convention.

The Convention plays a fundamental role in collective security and serves as an internationally recognized forum for cooperation against the threats posed by biological weapons. The BWC also supports the development of peaceful use of biological science and technology, and contributes to strengthening national public health, veterinary, agricultural and emergency-response capacities.

It is no coincidence that recent high-level
forums and reports have identified bio-weapons as a technology that will transform warfare and impact both our individual and collective security.

The BWC has a growing membership. However, to make it universal, and to make clear that all States reject the very notion of biological warfare, it is important that all States are party to the Convention.

As you will hear during the course of the workshop, assistance is available to help you through the process of agreeing to, and later, the implementation of the treaty.
To the Regional State Parties’ representatives:
You can play a crucial role in advocating for the universal adoption of the BWC. I would therefore like to urge you all to encourage our neighbours to accede to the BWC. By working together and promoting the noble goals and universality of the Biological Weapons Convention, we can make this world a safer place.

To the Non-State Parties’ representatives:
Likewise, I would like to urge you all to become strong advocates for encouraging your national governments to join the BWC at the earliest possible opportunity.

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 $US2.2 billion in economic losses caused in the countries most affected by the outbreak. In this context, the billionaire and philanthropist, Bill Gates, noted last year: "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.”

I firmly believe that as a region we can be strong if we stand together with our vision rooted in our shared values and beliefs. And our collective efforts can contribute to the overall objective of a secure region by realizing the unprecedented threats confronting our region.

We must be able to utilize collective diplomacy and international assistance through the ISU of the BWC in implementing the requirements of the
Convention and to engage constructively with each other. In doing so we must not lose sight of the international security architecture that continues to shape and re-shape our regional security outlook.

The development of common approaches by respective Governments to such UN instruments is vital to enhancing our solidarity as a region by establishing an equal footing in addressing these security issues. Remember, “United we stand, divided we fall.”

Your deliberations at this workshop are therefore crucial to demonstrate your
willingness to contribute meaningfully to regional security and solidarity, in particular the importance of the Convention and its global implications. We cannot remain in isolation.

I hope that after the workshop you would be able to prioritize this as an important agenda and look forward to the State Parties’ commitment towards implementing the obligations of the BWC and the non-State parties commitment towards convincing your respective governments to agree to the Convention.
With these few remarks, I would like to thank you once again for attending and wish you all a fruitful discussion.

Thank you, merci beaucoup and vinaka vaka levu.