

Statement
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President-designate of the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention

Regional African Parliamentary Workshop to Address
the Illicit Trade in SALW and Mitigate Armed Violence
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
2-3 April 2016

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 addressing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and mitigating armed violence.

I commend Parliamentarians for Global Action and the Government of Tanzania for organizing this Regional Workshop.

Today, I would like to draw your attention to another international treaty for which PGA is also a strong advocate. States Parties to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention will convene in Geneva, Switzerland from 7 to 25 November 2016 for the Convention's Eighth Review Conference in order to review the operation of this treaty. I am privileged to have been chosen as the President of the Review Conference, and it is in that capacity that I submit these remarks today.

I would like to express my thanks to PGA for their new campaign in support of the BWC, and to those parliamentarians from around the world who signed the "San Salvador Plan Of Action To Promote Universality and National Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention" at the 37th PGA Annual Forum last December. The Plan of Action demonstrates that support from Parliamentarians is crucial for the negotiation, implementation and sustainability of instruments such as the BWC.

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 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*". 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 multilateral disarmament. 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 173 States have joined the Convention. I have been informed this week that Côte d'Ivoire has completed its ratification process and will soon be formally announced as our 174th State Party. I am also aware that Angola has completed most of the domestic steps required for accession to the BWC and I therefore hope that Angola will soon become our 175th State Party. The Convention is a widely accepted norm against biological weapons with a growing membership. However, in order to make this norm 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.

Tanzania took an important step on 16 August 1972 when it signed the BWC, but it is among those States that have yet to ratify the Convention. I am encouraged to learn that over recent years, Tanzania has been actively participating in many BWC official meetings in Geneva and BWC related workshops in Africa, and I am especially pleased that on these occasions Tanzania officially expressed its intention to ratify the BWC in the near future. I hope to have the pleasure to soon welcome Tanzania as a new State Party to the Convention, perhaps even before the Eighth Review Conference in November.

Now, let me turn to the legislators and make a plea for your support: you can play a crucial role in advocating for the ratification and implementation of the BWC. We have seen this in the recent processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Angola and I would like to thank those involved for their efforts. 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 and, particularly for those of you from Liberia, Namibia and Tanzania, to encourage your national governments to join at the earliest possible opportunity.

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 just recently adopted a decision in support of the BWC. It has now entered into its implementation phase and is currently supporting national assistance programmes for developing countries.

I am aware that the expectations and stakes are high. 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.