

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

Regional Asia Parliamentary Round Table Meeting on Addressing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms
and Light Weapons
Kathmandu, Nepal
27 February 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, raising awareness, and mobilizing support for the Arms Trade Treaty.

I commend Parliamentarians for Global Action and the Government of Nepal for organizing this round table meeting and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland for its generous financial support.

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 also 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 ATT and 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. The Convention is therefore a widely accepted norm against biological weapons. 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.

Nepal took an important step on 10 April 1972 when it signed the BWC, but it is among the nine States that have yet to ratify the Convention. I am encouraged to learn that over recent years Nepal has made great strides towards joining the Convention, and I am especially pleased that the Cabinet has recently referred the BWC to the Constituent Assembly. I would like to acknowledge here the role played by Hon. Ramesh Lekhak MP. These positive steps show the commitment of officials and Parliamentarians here in Nepal to the objectives of the BWC, and I look forward to welcoming Nepal as a new State Party to the Convention, hopefully before the Review Conference in November.

Let me take this opportunity and make a plea for your support. As legislators, you can play a crucial role in advocating for the 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.

Finally, allow me to also point out that assistance is available to help you 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. Just last November for example, the ISU facilitated a legislative drafting workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh. 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 that will support 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.