Statement by Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Founder and President of the Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security and Conflict Transformation (WCAPS) to the 2017 Meeting of the States Parties to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC)

Monday, 4 December 2017

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me start by thanking you for allowing me on behalf of my organization to make a statement today. We greatly appreciate the inclusiveness of the BWC in promoting the voices of NGOs in these deliberations.

Mr. Chairman,

The BWC is part of an increasingly global security landscape consisting of an interconnected web of global health, security, and development multilateral forums. These forums, directly and indirectly, impact the work of the BWC and the Implementation Support Unit (ISU). The multitude of myriad government efforts that work to prevent bioweapons proliferation and terrorism can seem confusing at times. It is difficult to see those connections when there is so much going on. However, those relationships amongst multilateral platforms do exist. Today, one needs to not only understand the links, but one must also find ways to leverage those connections to exchange expertise, make the most use of funding advantages to achieve significant global goals and help ensure the success of the BWC in a changing landscape.

In this respect, the future work of the BWC can benefit from a more strengthened and increasingly strategic approach to how its work fits within this broader global context of health, security, and development. The global security platforms that impact the work of the BWC being referenced here are the Sustainable Develop Goals (SDG), the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) and the related Joint External Evaluations (JEE), the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (Global Partnership) and UNSCR 1540.

As noted, these platforms share goals of the BWC. UNSCR 1540 imposes binding obligations on all states to adopt legislation to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their means of delivery. It focuses on laws and assistance to countries needing help in implementing their BWC obligations. The GHSA, with over 50 current country participants, seeks to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease threats, whether accidental, natural or by intentional means, working to among other things strengthen the biosecurity capacity of countries to prevent the use of bio-pathogens for a terrorist act. The Joint External Evaluations provide states with an understanding of their current capabilities to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease and based on the results, countries then develop 5-year roadmaps on what are the exact steps they need to take to strengthen their health security systems. Those steps include areas directly related to preventing terrorism and proliferation again through strengthening a country’s biosecurity systems and well as laboratory systems. The Global Partnership provides funding to states to enhance global capacities in biosecurity. Its work also promotes the implementation of the GHSA and BWC in preventing biological weapons acquisition and use, to include export controls. It also has a direct mandate to implement UNSCR 1540. Finally, and very importantly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) brings in a development lens to the areas of biosecurity and infectious disease. For example, SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being, highlights the need for health governance at the national and regional levels. The goal, like the other SDGs, require nationally owned
and country-led sustainable development strategies to mobilize plans to fund the work. Part of the work of SDG 3 is focused on addressing the threat of infectious disease. A robust global effort will be needed to implement the SDGs and funding to achieve the goals will continue to be significant.

Mr. Chairman,

These cross-sector issues of biosecurity, health, and development, can lead to a strengthening of the BWC as people begin to see how the maze is not so confusing and they can also see how they can implement the BWC while also strengthening their capacities in both health and development. For example, as they fulfill their JEE 5-year roadmaps, they will realize that they are also enhancing their ability to prevent the intentional malicious use of bio-pathogens and thereby prevent bioweapons use. They can even start to consider how working more strategically, limited resources can be used to implement more of their obligations from various platforms, to include the continued implementation of the BWC. Finding ways to leverage resources to accomplish all of the goals of the various multilateral efforts is paramount in light of the significant mandates of the many multilateral initiatives.

It is not surprising that those of us working in more than one field often face questions about how the maze of initiatives and activities connect within specific areas. I am not surprised to hear that the ISU when conducting regional events, is frequently asked how its work and the BWC relates to other related global platforms. People in Ministries and on the ground want help in understanding connections amongst the related global activities. For example, countries are looking to the ISU to help them understand the overall relationship of these international security issues, most of which require action on their part to comply with many provisions. The BWC can itself be a connector particularly when the ISU is traveling to different regions to promote the Convention. As I noted on a blog, I wrote two months ago on this issue, “smaller, developing states’ parties have worked to connect the dots between bioweapons, biosecurity, infectious disease, nonproliferation, science, and technology, and they are looking to the ISU for guidance. This outreach shows that the BWC is not an isolated instrument—instead, it is related to other ongoing global initiatives of international security, such as on global health security and nonproliferation.”

Better coordination would also provide leverage for collaboration to promote the universality of the BWC as well as the implementation of treaty provisions of the BWC. Champions can exist on other global platforms, and as each does its work, talking points on the importance of BWC implementation can become a part of their lexicon. As a case in point, where there are donors who assist in the areas of security and health, there should be coordination of their activities and outreach in promoting the BWC. In some cases, donors could be promoting the importance of the BWC and universality as well as continued implementation as part of their funding efforts. While funding may not be based on joining and implementing the BWC, a connection to the BWC in discussions would certainly raise the level of attention to the BWC when funders are engaged with other countries.

As I started this talk, I noted the maze of global platforms that impact the work of the BWC and the ISU. I reiterate that the BWC should embrace those relevant multilateral forums noted as a way to leverage shared interests to promote the goals of the BWC, such as universality, biosecurity, and prevention of bioweapons. The BWC can determine how its ongoing work fits into the global security landscape and find ways to collaborate and coordinate where it is advantageous. Doing so will also help to ensure the sustainability of the BWC by connecting it to the implementation of other important global platforms.

Mr. Chairman, I want to invite those interested in this subject to side event to take place Wednesday, December 6th from 0900 – 1000 in room XXV here at The Palais.

Thank you for your attention.