Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me a few moments at the outset to express my sincere appreciation to the Parliament of New Zealand, the European Union, UNODA and the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention for organizing this event.

Substantial, long term commitment of both resources and expertise are essential pre-requisites in achieving our shared goals and objectives.

PGA is also very grateful for having been invited and to be afforded this opportunity to make a brief presentation here today.

The Role of Parliamentarians in the Universalization of the BWC can perhaps be viewed from two different, but closely linked positions.

The First is the traditional role that MPs play, not just in the Universalization of the BWC, but in the Universalization of any international treaty.

In a large majority of countries worldwide, including in this region, the prerogatives and responsibilities of MPs are carefully set out and delineated in respective constitutions and national legislation.

Where a Government has decided to proceed to ratification of an international treaty, assent of Parliament is frequently a formal requirement before an Instrument of Ratification may be deposited.

At the very least, some form of engagement or consultation with the legislative branch of Government is typically mandated.

Right away, therefore, we see an immediate and important responsibility accruing to Members of Parliament with respect to universalization of international treaties, including the BWC.
Another longstanding, widely established constitutional norm is the integral role played by Parliamentarians in the drafting of legislation to give effect to the provisions of an international treaty.

In some countries, the drafting and implementation of such legislation may only begin after ratification of, or accession to, a treaty has taken place.

However, in many others, a constitutional requirement exists that such legislation must be put in place BEFORE ratification of or accession to a treaty may proceed.

Here too, therefore, we see how Parliamentarians, as lawmakers, are typically front and center of this legislative process without which ratification of the international treaty or convention in question cannot take place.

This is the first point of note when it comes to the role of Parliamentarians in promoting universalization of international treaties, including the Biological Weapons Convention.

However the second part is every bit as important, if not more so in the overall – sometimes rather Byzantine process that arises when joining an international treaty.

The word Parliamentarians is of course derived from the 11th century Old French word ‘parlement’, that exists to this day from ‘parler’, meaning, of course, "to talk". Parliamentarians are both lawmakers and advocates.

They are tasked with deliberating and discussing, reaching their own conclusions, not simply tagging along unquestioningly with the views of another branch of government.

This is, after all, the essence of the checks and balances system of any modern day thriving democracy.

Crucially, Parliamentarians, in espousing their views, can also seek to encourage – or call upon, the Executive Branch of Government to take action.

This can take the form of a Statement or Question in Parliament, a Motion or a Resolution. It can manifest itself in many different ways.

Parliamentarians can, and frequently do, encourage the executive branch of power to join treaties which are of great importance, including at the national level.
The point can, in fact, be well illustrated by the path taken by many Member Parliamentarians of PGA with respect to a number of international treaties, including the BWC.

Many Members of Parliament serve concurrently also as Government Ministers which can also help to expedite the process for universalization of international treaties, such as the BWC.

Governments will usually not proceed to a decision on a treaty unless they receive a Memorandum to Cabinet from the relevant Ministry, outlining the benefits of joining the treaty in question.

I am glad to say that PGA Members in this region have been particularly active on this front.

Here in New Zealand, the Minister for Pacific Peoples and Associate Minister of Justice of New Zealand, Hon. Aupito William Sio, a Member of PGA for the past 6 years, has made significant efforts across the region, both with respect to promoting universalization of the BWC and, more recently, with respect to Solomon Islands, encouraging submission of its First National Report to the UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

Perhaps of less relevance in the context of this Workshop, it nevertheless is worth mentioning that Hon. Minister Sio has been a strong proponent also of universalization and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty in the region, indeed with some success – over the past 5 years.

Assistant Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Adrian Ruhawe, here with us today, has also participated effectively in a recent Workshop we organized in Samoa last year.

In Samoa itself, Associate Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Hon. Taefu Lemi Taefu, introduced to PGA by Hon. Minister Aupito Sio, and who was very disappointed not to be able to join us here today, almost single-handedly steered the entire process leading to accession by Samoa to the BWC in September 2017.

I am very pleased to see Niue represented today who took similar steps and acceded to the BWC last year.
It is also very positive to see high level representation from both the Governments of Tuvalu and Kiribati at our event today.

Within PGA, our ongoing outreach and contacts with both of you in the run up to this Workshop has also been very productive.

A number of you also participated in a Workshop that we organized in Vanuatu earlier this year so it is good to see you again.

Worldwide, and just in the past 4 years, PGA Members have made decisive contributions to ratification of, or accession to, the BWC by 6 countries.

Our efforts continue, in parallel with our many other initiatives to prevent proliferation of WMD as well as addressing the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

Later today, we will hear more from experts as to why the BWC is a treaty of particular importance and relevance in the Pacific Islands region.

I hope this will help to inform your respective internal processes in this regard.

Your Excellencies, Members of Parliament, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

We have an ambitious agenda today and not so much time in which to complete it.

It is my sincere hope that today’s deliberations, brief that they may necessarily be, will nevertheless lead to full universalization of the BWC in the Pacific Islands region within the next year or two.

We, in PGA, continue to stand ready to assist you in any way that may be considered helpful.

Thank you.