2019 Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Statement by UNICRI

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), I wish to express my gratitude to the States Parties of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and to the BWC Implementation Support Unit for the opportunity to address this year’s Meeting.

National needs and regional priorities for biological security

I would like to inform you that, this year, UNICRI in partnership with the Government of Canada and in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) prepared three reports that identify national needs and regional priorities for biological security in the Middle East, the South East Asia and the South America.

The reports identify regional capacity-building priorities to help inform the allocation of biological security resources through the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (Global Partnership), the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), and related global programs.

The reports focused on capabilities needed to prevent, detect and/or respond to accidental or deliberate disease events (including biosafety and biosecurity, national laboratory systems, surveillance, emergency response operations, and link between public health and security authorities) and they were based on an analysis of relevant national needs assessments and action plans – with an emphasis on Joint External Evaluations (JEEs) – published articles, and data generated through a custom survey and interviews with experts from the region.

Emphasis was placed on understanding biological threats and biological security on a regional basis. Among the key results of the reports, I would like to mention the need to invest in capacity-building projects for developing sustainable biosafety and biosecurity training and education programs that are adapted to local resource constraints and build towards cultivating local experts.

Technology and Security

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to mention UNICRI’s activities in the area of technology and security. UNICRI, in partnership and with the financial support of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), is analysing risks and benefits associated with WMD-relevant advances in
science and technology, with the primary aim of identifying technology solutions that can be piloted to match the needs of Member States to prevent WMD terrorism.

To better understand the potential misuse of technology, UNICRI has prepared **risk scenarios** on topics such as:

1. Misuse of drones to release toxic material;
2. AI-powered cyberattacks to undermine trust in vaccines during outbreaks;
3. Infiltration of synthetic biology laboratories.

To identify technology solutions, UNICRI is organizing a **call for ideas** (published on our website) and will organize an expert workshop in Geneva in 2020. Subsequently, UNICRI will prepare a **Final Report** that contains the main results.

In addition, UNICRI is continuing the cooperation established with FBI to mitigate risks posed by advancements in research and development of scientific fields of biotechnology through the **International Network on Biotechnology (INB)**, a global network of academic and research institutions committed to advancing education and raising awareness about responsible life science.

For example, this year UNICRI and FBI, with the technical expertise of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), conducted a workshop in Geneva with experts from Algeria and Tunisia to build partnerships between local industry, academia, and law enforcement to disrupt efforts to build a mobile chemical and biological weapons (CBW) laboratory by non-state actors. UNICRI also co-hosted a workshop with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and UNICRI that brought together international experts and emerging leaders from different countries to discuss global programs dedicated to biosecurity and the prevention of the misuse of current and future biotechnologies.

**EU CBRN Centres of Excellence of initiative**

Last but not least, I would like to mention that in the year 2020 the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence initiative will celebrate its 10th anniversary. Funded by the European Union and supported by UNICRI, the initiative has now united 61 partner countries that continue activities to improve their policies to enhance their overall preparedness and capacity to mitigate the consequences of CBRN risks.

In particular I would like to mention the important results achieved by Project 53 that focuses on the reinforcement of the national legal framework and the provision of specialized training on bio-safety and bio-security in Central Asia countries (whose results will be showcased today during a side event), the project MediPIET in the Mediterranean and Black Sea and the project MEDILABSECURE in the Mediterranean, Black Sea and Sahel regions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.