



**INTERVENTION BY THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
DURING THE THIRD SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE
STRENGTHENING OF THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (BWC)
GENEVA, 4 TO 8 DECEMBER 2023**

TOPIC: CONFIDENCE BUILDING AND TRANSPARENCY

4 December 2023

Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

South Africa takes this opportunity to congratulate Your Excellency Ambassador Damico for your stewardship of this Working Group and appreciates and welcomes the dialogue on this vital topic of Confidence-building and Transparency. We also express appreciation to the delegations of Peru and Switzerland for the work undertaken as Friends of the Chair and for their presentation of the non-paper in this regard.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was the first multilateral disarmament treaty aimed at the prohibition of the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons. Despite the many advancements and gains since the treaty's adoption, rapid biotechnological and scientific advancements, as well as natural and man-made disasters require our continued attention and increased cooperation to recognise and mitigate any harm, and to ensure that biological agents and toxins are used purely for peaceful purposes.

Confidence-building and transparency measures can play an important role in the prevention or reduction in the possible development and use of biological weapons. In addition, confidence-building and transparency measures could also serve as an enabler to support national implementation efforts. These measures, as articulated in the non-paper by the Friends of the Chair, may serve as an orientation tool or guideline to assist particularly developing countries, but also new States Parties to the Convention to understand and begin the process, and to build skills and capacities to strengthen national implementation of the Convention.

Although confidence-building and transparency measures may serve as a tool for strengthening national implementation, there is still much uncertainty given their voluntary nature and the fact that they do not guarantee full compliance by all State Parties.

It further allows for the “*reduction of ambiguities*”, as agreed to at the 2nd Review Conference in 1986.

Chairperson, the world has evolved significantly since the introduction of the confidence-building system following the second Review Conference in 1986. While there was agreement on the objective to “*prevent or reduce the occurrence of ambiguities, doubt and suspicions, and in order to improve international co-operation in the field of peaceful bacteriological activities*”, the system was never intended as a substitute for a legally binding instrument, but rather as a complementary measure. My delegation therefore continues to support the negotiation of a legally binding protocol to strengthen the Convention as a whole, including appropriate verification provisions that would also take into consideration technological advancements which may impact on the effectiveness of the Convention in preventing the development and use of biological weapons.

Chairperson,

It is time that we walk the talk, and South Africa is committed to the full implementation of the Convention and stands ready to participate in and support efforts in this regard.

I thank you.