



**Statement of H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International
Organizations in Geneva, Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the 9th Review
Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention**
Geneva, 29 November 2022

Mr. President,

From the outset, please allow me to extend the congratulations of the Holy See for your election as president of this 9th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). Meeting at a time when the world is suffering a profound “famine for peace”¹ with many of our brothers and sisters suffering from the scourge of conflicts, the Holy See hopes that a successful outcome of this Review Conference could truly “contribute to the strengthening of confidence between peoples and the general improvement of the international atmosphere”²

Mr. President,

Today, we are confronted with unprecedented complexities to prevent the nefarious use of biological weapons that no State alone can manage. The misuse of dual-use capabilities and facilities remains a serious risk; breakthroughs in life sciences and the convergence between artificial intelligence and biotechnologies are posing increasingly difficult challenges to the implementation of the BWC; bioterrorism, genetic manipulation and the more and more frequent spread of large-scale communicable diseases all threaten global health and security.

In the face of such shared risks for our peoples, common responsibility and cooperation should be the watchwords. The BWC is an essential pillar of international disarmament and security, and its Preamble solemnly affirms that the use of biological weapons “would be repugnant to the conscience of mankind and that no effort should be spared to minimize this risk”. Indeed, the use of biological weapons is a perversion of science. Using “life” to spread suffering and death is an affront to human dignity and goes against the very notion of human development, when instead we could use biotechnologies to cure diseases, alleviate suffering and protect the environment.

In this regard, education plays a crucial role in addressing the issue of misuse at its roots. The Holy See appeals to scientists to apply their ingenuity and creativity for the service of the common good and the betterment of human life. We welcome the increased focus on the development of ethical codes of conduct in recent years. All stakeholders should join forces for the responsible use of biotechnology to promote life and integral human development. As Pope Francis reminds us: “...[w]e have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.”³

Mr. President,

Advances in science, technology, international cooperation and assistance are strictly interconnected. Art. XII mandates to review the operation of the Convention, taking into account new scientific and technological developments. This is not optional. It is a legal requirement.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Angelus 20 November 2022, Asti.

² Cf. Preamble, BWC.

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, par. 112.

The immense benefits that arise from human creativity in scientific and technological developments must be assessed against the backdrop of their potential risks as well as their ethical implications. Since the last Review Conference, much work has been conducted in the framework of the BWC, and several valuable proposals and confidence-building measures have been formulated, including a periodic science and technology review process and an institutional strengthening of the Convention through confidence building measures and ultimately a legally-binding verification Protocol. It is up to us to take stock of the many proposals and concretize the common points. For its part, the Holy See supports such initiatives in the measure that they are oriented towards the common good and the protection of human life.

Mr. President,

Breakthroughs in life sciences also contribute to shedding light on the link between disarmament and development and their symbiotic relationship. In this regard, the right to participate in the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials, scientific and technological information for peaceful purposes as enshrined in Article X assumes greater importance. The devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed our false securities and highlighted the limitations of the national and international response.

It is not hard to imagine that such humanitarian responses would be even more difficult and strained in the case of the use of biological weapons, especially if this occurred during an armed conflict. For such reasons, the lack of an institutional mechanism for assistance under the BWC must also be urgently reassessed and institutionalized, considering that there are no specific direct provisions for the victims of such attacks.

Mr. President,

Instruments prohibiting weapons of mass destruction such as the BWC entail more than just legal obligations. They are also moral commitments based on trust among States and among States' representatives, and they are rooted in the trust that citizens place in their governments, with moral stakes for the whole of humanity including future generations.⁴

In order to maintain the pertinence and value of the BWC, this Review Conference needs to agree upon comprehensive implementation mechanisms. At this particular point in history, "instruments of cooperation and prevention constitute one of the most effective safeguards in the face of heinous acts such as the potential use of biological weapons."⁵ The Holy See urgently reiterates its call for the cessation of conflicts and for the establishment of a culture of peace and of life, based upon the values of responsibility, justice and dialogue.

Let us ensure that the application of biological sciences remains solely dedicated to the improvement of health and development. Let us not give in to the fragmentation of solutions and a situation where reciprocal vetoes impede the strengthening of the Convention. This is a responsibility which we cannot shirk. Today's complacency and inaction could very well be tomorrow's catastrophe.

Thank you.

⁴ Cf. Position Paper of the Holy See to the 1st Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Vienna, 22 June 2022.

⁵ Cf. Instrument of Accession of the Holy See to BWC, 7 January 2002.