

**Third Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of  
Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction  
New York, 14-18 November 2022  
General Debate Statement: Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons  
Convention  
Presented by Adedeji Ebo, Director and Deputy to the High Representative,  
Office for Disarmament Affairs**

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention, I am pleased to address this Third Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. The BWC Implementation Support Unit addressed the First Session of the Conference in 2019 and the Second Session last year and is pleased to do so again this year.

Let me start by joining others in wishing you, Mr. President, with the support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, every success in the work ahead of you.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

The Biological Weapons Convention was the first international treaty outlawing an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. The Convention, along with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Chemical Weapons Convention, is one of the key components of the international disarmament architecture to address the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Convention entered into force more than 45 years ago, in 1975. It currently has 184 States Parties. Eleven States have become parties to the Biological Weapons Convention in recent years and over 93 per cent of the world is now bound by its terms.

Most States from the Middle East region are already party to the BWC. Three States from the region have signed but not ratified the Convention: Egypt, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic. Three States from the region have neither signed nor ratified the Convention: Comoros, Djibouti and Israel.

The steady progress towards full universalization is a significant achievement for a treaty of its age and demonstrates its continuing relevance. It is well understood that universal adherence to the Convention is needed to strengthen the global norm against the use of biological agents and toxins as weapons.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Since the Implementation Support Unit addressed the First Session of this Conference back in 2019, the world has experienced the worst pandemic for over a century. The COVID-19 pandemic showed in stark terms the societal and economic disruption and tragic loss of life that infectious diseases can cause. We should no longer be under any illusions about the risks posed to our interconnected societies by biological agents.

While the likelihood of the deliberate use of disease as a weapon of war or terror may be low, COVID-19 has shown that it is a risk for which we are woefully unprepared. We therefore

need to address these challenges and improve global preparedness for biological risks, whether naturally or deliberately occurring.

The BWC is an important forum for cooperation in meeting international security obligations. Biological weapons can be used to attack not only humans, but also livestock and crops. These weapons can kill and incapacitate both civilians and military personnel and can also have devastating economic effects. All States are potentially at risk from such weapons and all can therefore benefit from becoming parties to the Convention.

Compared with other weapons of mass destruction, biological weapons are relatively easy to develop, transfer and conceal. Moreover, rapid developments in science and technology are creating a variety of environmental, ethical, political and social risks and challenges.

The struggle against biological weapons must, therefore, like the diseases involved, cross geographical boundaries and requires interdisciplinary expertise from the security, scientific, public health and agricultural sectors. The Convention provides a useful framework to bring such a diverse range of actors and expertise together.

There is a growing risk that biological weapons may be obtained and used by non-State actors, including terrorist groups. Wider adherence to the Convention will ensure that there are fewer places where bioterrorists can work with impunity. Becoming a party to the Convention is a step all States can take to help reduce the threat of bioterrorism.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

This need is made more urgent by recent developments in science and technology. While their universal benefits are unprecedented, their dual-use nature can also create risks of misuse for which we are not sufficiently prepared. Thus, it is important that advances in biological science and related applications must continue to be carefully monitored within the framework of the Convention, along with related convergent technologies.

It is vital that the diplomatic and scientific communities work together to tackle our common challenges, particularly to ensure that security concerns do not hamper beneficial scientific advances and their application for the good of humanity. Thus, we need to deepen our efforts to maintain and further build strong relations and partnerships with the scientific and technological community. Scientists have always been instrumental for sound and forward-looking arms control and disarmament.

Article X of the Convention requires States parties to facilitate and have the right to participate in the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the use of biological agents and toxins for peaceful purposes.

Bilateral or regional assistance and cooperation may be available under the Convention that is not available through other channels, or not available to non-parties. In terms of training and capacity-building in the Middle East region specifically, the Implementation Support Unit, with funding from the European Union, is currently providing assistance to the State of Palestine.

The Implementation Support Unit also provides administrative support and advice on all aspects of accession, ratification and implementation. The financial costs involved in becoming a party to the BWC, which is funded entirely by extra-budgetary resources, are minimal.

Further details on implementation aspects of the Convention, including on participation in official meetings by States from the region and the submission of Confidence-Building Measures can be found in the background document prepared by the BWC Implementation Support Unit, which has been submitted to this Third Session of the Conference as document A/CONF.236/2022/BD.1 dated 1 September 2022.

BWC States Parties are now focusing their full attention on the Ninth Review Conference which will convene in Geneva in two weeks' time on 28 November. There is a growing expectation that the Review Conference will be able to take concrete decisions to strengthen the Convention. ww

The upcoming Review Conference and the Convention's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025 are ideal milestones to target universal adherence to the Convention and the Implementation Support Unit looks forward to continuing to work with States in the region towards that goal.

I thank you for your attention.