

**Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear  
Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction**

**New York, 18–22 November 2019**

**Statement by Dr. Hermann Lampalzer, Deputy Chief,**

**Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention**

Madame President,

1. On behalf of the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention, I am pleased to address this Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Let me start by joining others in wishing you, Madame President, with the support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, every success in the work ahead of you.

Madame President, distinguished delegates,

2. 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.
3. The Convention entered into force more than 44 years ago, in 1975. It currently has 183 States Parties. Ten States have become parties to the Biological Weapons Convention in the last five years and over 93 per cent of the world is now bound by its terms.
4. Most States from the Middle East region are 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.

5. 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.

Madame President, distinguished delegates,

6. 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 benefit from becoming parties to the Convention.
7. 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 framing to bring such a diverse range of actors and expertise together.
8. There is also 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.

Madame President, distinguished delegates,

9. The Biological Weapons Convention is not only a key pillar of the global disarmament architecture; it is also a key component of promoting global health security and the sustainable development goals. Strong public health systems are necessary to prevent and combat naturally-occurring diseases. A strong public health system is also an effective deterrent against the

development of biological weapons, and the first line of response if such weapons are used.

10. In his agenda for disarmament launched in Geneva last year, Secretary-General Guterres highlighted the role of the BWC as a forum to consider preventative measures, such as strong national health systems, cooperation, robust response capacities and effective counter-measures.
11. This need is made more urgent by recent developments in science and technology. Whereas 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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 specifically, the Implementation Support Unit, with funding from the European Union, organized a regional workshop on scientific and technological developments related to the Convention in Amman in 2018 and capacity-building assistance upon request to Iraq and Lebanon. 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.

15. 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 made available as document A/CONF.236/2.

Madame President, distinguished delegates,

16. I would like to conclude by wishing you all a successful Conference. Thank you for this opportunity to address the Conference.