



**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons (BWC) and on Their Destruction
4-7 December 2018, Geneva**

**General Statement, delivered by H.E. A.L.A. Azeez,
Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission
of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva**

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by extending our warm congratulations to you on your election as the Chair of States Parties' Meeting this year.

Sri Lanka accords high priority to the effective implementation of this important international instrument. Being the first multilateral treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, the BWC, in the past 40 years, has established a strong norm against the use or threat of use of biological weapons.

The continuing drive towards universalization of the Convention, bringing within its scope, remaining States, would further strengthen this norm against the use or threat of use of biological weapons or deliberate use of diseases as weapons. In our efforts towards achieving universalization of the Convention, we consider recent accessions by the State of Palestine and Niue and ratification by the Central African Republic as welcome developments.

The implementation of the Convention both at the national level and at the international level, is key to ensuring a world free from the threat of biological weapons. In Sri Lanka, at the national level, we have taken a number of initiatives for implementation, which range from introduction of guidelines and biosafety manuals in dealing with hazardous agents, to training of staff and awareness-raising.

The national Strategic Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance under the 'One Health' concept that Sri Lanka has developed, is currently in the process of implementation. Further measures are being initiated to strengthen

actions in the areas identified as not optimal following the external review of the International Health Regulations.

Areas identified for improvement are receiving policy priority, and we hope to achieve progress on them in the short to medium term. A more comprehensive approach to addressing all aspects of the Convention, however, places a strong emphasis on a substantive legislation and targeted policy interventions. Learning from the experiences of State Parties and sharing of good practices is important, and such an inclusive process would contribute to further improving the policy and legal framework.

Strengthening the national capacity remains imperative, and a host of measures are being taken to achieve it on a medium to long term basis. This includes training and capacity building, as well as upgrading the laboratories and research institutes. It would help Sri Lanka to be fully equipped with capabilities to survey, detect, diagnose and combat infectious diseases as well as other possible biological threats undermining peace and security.

We continue to appreciate the generous support provided for the **Sponsorship Programme** under the BWC. This has enabled the participation of experts, mostly from developing countries, in relevant meetings addressing the different aspects of the Convention. In addition to helping participants to gain a wide understanding of the provisions of the Convention and their intended purposes and expected effects, the sponsorship programme brings together experts from diverse countries, thus contributing to informal networks for future cooperation.

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are considered as an important tool to promote transparency. Efforts at strengthening and effectively implementing CBMs should continue, as follow-up to the Convention proceeds. It is pertinent to note, however, that CBMs alone do not provide collective assurance as to all provisions of the Convention being fully realized by all State Parties.

We are mindful of the wide range of views that are currently prevalent with regard to a multilateral agreement on a mechanism for verification of compliance with the Convention. Sri Lanka, however, shares the position of the Non-Aligned Movement to strengthen the full implementation of the Convention, including through **negotiation and conclusion of a legally binding Protocol** setting out modalities to ensure efficacy and consistency to follow-up on all provisions of the Convention.

Since the Convention is not limited to addressing the issues of biological and toxin weapons, but encompasses the dual-use nature and potential benefits which the technologies surrounding this issue could result in, Sri Lanka attaches priority to the efficacious operationalization of **Article X**. Full and effective implementation of Article X could generate equitable benefits for State parties, in particular, developing countries, and we call upon all States Parties to cooperate in, and commit themselves to, peaceful exploration and use of biology.

Review of new scientific and technological developments in the field of life sciences and other areas relevant to the Convention, under **Article XII** is also an important element. Peaceful use of biology, a field which continues to evolve with new technological advances, is critical to ensuring security at all levels. In the context of the UN Development Agenda -2030, encouraging and supporting inter-state cooperation in the use of biological advances is an important step in national and international efforts to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. Article XII reviews, however, could enable State Parties to keep abreast of such advances, assess related threats, and intervene accordingly, to preserve and promote the objectives of the Convention.

State Parties' collective agreement on measures for practical implementation is vital for the maintenance of the relevance of the Convention to contemporary challenges. Therefore, addressing all interlinked elements of the Convention in a comprehensive manner, which could help harness its full potential for the benefit of humanity is essential.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its commitment to the Biological Weapons Convention and to work towards strengthening national capacities in cooperation with other stakeholders for full and effective implementation of the Convention. We are confident that, with your able leadership, the meeting could agree on a forward looking outcome, overcoming divisions and helping to build further confidence, to advance the objectives of the Convention.

Thank you.