

Meeting of States Parties to the BWC - 14-18 December 2015

PGA is a non-profit and non-partisan organisation and is the largest international network of individual legislators, with over 1,300 Members from 140 countries and 5 regional Parliaments. PGA informs and mobilises parliamentarians in all regions of the world to advocate for the full implementation of internationally-agreed treaties and norms on human rights, the rule of law, democracy, disarmament, peace and security, non-discrimination and gender equality.

PGA has recently launched its new *Campaign for the Universality and National Implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention*, as it believes that Parliamentarians, in exercising their unique prerogatives as law makers as well as their important oversight and accountability responsibilities vis-à-vis executive power actions, have an important role to play in addressing – at least in part – the twin challenges presented by the still lack of full universality of the Convention as well as filling the void created by the absence of verification mechanism to monitor compliance with the provisions of the BWC.

The PGA BWC Campaign is comprised of a number of complementary components, including the education, awareness-raising and mobilisation of PGA members and other concerned Parliamentarians worldwide and the organisation of international and/or regional Parliamentary Workshops to foster peer-to-peer dialogue and to provide platforms for the sharing of respective experiences in addition to generating political will to promote universality and more complete national implementation of the BWC.

The first activity of the Campaign organised by PGA, with the support of Australia, Canada, Denmark and SIDA, was a Global Parliamentary Forum in El Salvador to promote the universality and national implementation of the BWC, on 1 December 2015. Moreover, subject to arrangements and partnership to be put in place, PGA is planning to organise 2 Roundtable Consultations to promote universality and implementation of the BWC in Africa and the Asia Pacific region in 2016. PGA has an active membership in 11 countries that are *not yet* States Parties to the BWC and in many others where full implementation of the BWC has *yet* to be achieved.

The Annual Forum focussed on the role of Parliamentarians in support of peace and security and was co-organized by the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador and PGA. It gathered parliamentarians from 40 countries worldwide, as well as international and regional organization experts, Government officials and representatives from civil society, and aimed at generating substantial political will among lawmakers to take concrete steps to promote universality and implementation of the BWC in advance of the BWC Review Conference at the end of next year.

As a result of the PGA global parliamentary forum, the following challenges were identified:

➤ ***At the international level:***

- Achieve full universality of the Biological Weapons Convention in order to establish a more robust global regime against the development, use and stockpiling of biological weapons.
- In the continued absence of a formal verification mechanism, and with limited prospects for agreement on one in the near future, the vital importance of legislators in filling this vacuum, in particular in the exercise of their oversight and accountability prerogatives vis-à-vis the executive branch of government in their respective countries.
- Enhance transparency and strengthen international capacities for coordination, investigation and assistance in the event of an outbreak or bioweapons attack.

- Harmonised identification and control of dual-use research and agents, so as to establish a homogeneous international regime on the control of such goods, while not impairing the sovereign right of every State to conduct research in this field and benefit from its developments for peaceful purposes. Indeed, some participants highlighted the difficulty to establish a clear demarcation between peaceful and hostile uses of technology.

➤ *At the national level:*

- Political changes and elections may impair political will and therefore disrupt and delay any current ongoing ratification/implementation process.
- Low visibility of the Convention and lack of awareness on its principles, objectives and benefits among the political class, scientists and experts.
- Lack of political will and priority at the national level to ratify and/or implement the BWC, particularly considering that some countries do not feel concerned by the Convention as they do not and have no intention to engage in activities using or developing biological agents. With a growing number of emerging reports of violent extremist groups that employ terrorist tactics, including Da'esh/ISIS, seeking to develop and possibly use such weapons, this lack of awareness and political will can now be more effectively addressed.
- Harmonisation, codification and update of the existing legislative and regulatory framework or, if appropriate, adoption of a comprehensive implementing legislation addressing all aspects and provisions of the Convention.
- Lack of capacity and resources to effectively implement the BWC and adopt the necessary regulations and measures to monitor biological activities and control imports and exports.

While determining the challenges to universality and implementation of the BWC, the participants also identified the several benefits to joining the BWC and agreed that these benefits had to be advertised in order to encourage Parliaments and Governments to ratify and/or implement the Convention.

All participants stressed the crucial role of parliamentarians in promoting and encouraging ratification, as well as in initiating and supporting such process with their respective Governments. As legislators, they considered that they could also reach out to key decision makers and urge them to support and take action on this major issue. Leading Parliamentarians from Tanzania, Nepal and Liberia publicly committed to promote within their countries the ratification of the BWC. PGA is also working with Parliamentarians in several other countries bilaterally in Africa and the Pacific Islands that have not yet become party to the BWC.

The participants also agreed to raise awareness on the BWC, and use their unique legislative prerogatives to promote, adopt and monitor the implementation of the national level. Commitments on this regard were made at the Annual Forum by Legislators from Argentina, Philippines, Uruguay, Maldives, and Morocco among others.

In addition, they recognised that parliamentarians were not the only key actors in strengthening the implementation of the BWC, and that they should encourage the creation or review of national authorities, as well as regulations and guidelines on biosecurity and biosafety.

During the discussions, the participating parliamentarians emphasised that the BWC is of high relevance today, considering the constant evolution of biotechnology and research in this field, and the risk of biological weapons being used by non-State actors. As such, they considered that the need to take action now is one of particular urgency, as it is their responsibility also as representatives of their people, to address international issues such as disarmament and non-proliferation, to monitor biological activities and to implement the objectives they have set and to which they have committed.

Upon conclusion of the Annual Forum, the participants adopted the **San Salvador Plan of Action to Promote Universality and National Implementation of the BWC**, in which they committed to:

- Encourage their colleagues in Parliament and Government to take action on this issue through the different agencies of the State.
- Raise awareness and identify concrete steps to move forward with ratification and/or implementation of the BWC within their Parliaments.
- Introduce, inter alia, motions, parliamentary questions, resolutions or bills to promote ratification and/or implementation of the BWC, as appropriate.
- Take the necessary measures to ensure the concrete and effective implementation of the BWC, as well as the full respect for, and implementation of, the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004).

In this framework, PGA's International Secretariat based in New York and The Hague will provide assistance and cooperation to PGA Members and other concerned Parliamentarians and will engage in activities that will strengthen political support towards a universal and effective BWC.

Thank you for your attention.