

Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

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English only

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Statement of the Republic of Uganda

Submitted by the Republic of Uganda

Thank you for giving me the floor.

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Uganda, I wish to congratulate you on your election as President of the 2023 Meeting of State Parties (MSP) to Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). I wish to further thank the Implementation Support Unit for supporting state parties in the implementation of the convention's obligations and in organizing these meetings

As a State Party to the BWC since 5th December 1992, Uganda is committed to and has actively translated international obligations into effective national actions within its territory and in the foreign states where she operates under bilateral understanding.

Uganda wishes to highlight key achievements in implementing the Convention's provisions, the challenges faced, and the strategies for continuous improvement in managing biological threats, including the emerging concerns in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the technological advancement in dual use biology and science.

Commitment to the Convention. Uganda, adhering to Article IV of the Convention, has implemented robust measures to prohibit and prevent the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, or retention of prohibited items as specified in Article I. This includes the establishment of comprehensive legal systems, policies, infrastructure development and building human and technical capacity of the implementing agencies.

Emphasizing International Cooperation. Uganda also recognizes the critical importance of international cooperation and assistance in the BWC context. She supports the establishment of an International Cooperation and Assistance Committee. This Committee would play a pivotal role in assessing and guiding responses to high-risk biological threats. Additionally, Uganda commits to making greater use of the ISU-administered Article X database to facilitate assistance requests and offers, reinforcing our commitment to global collaboration.

Science and Technology Review Mechanism. Acknowledging the rapid advancements in science and technology, Uganda emphasizes the need for a comprehensive ongoing mechanism to assess scientific and technological developments relevant to the BWC. This mechanism should include periodic reviews of Science and Technology (S&T) developments, assessing both the benefits and risks to the Convention and the global prohibitive norm against biological weapons. Uganda therefore advocates for a consensus position on this S&T review mechanism, ensuring it has representative membership, appropriate resources, and forward-looking working methods.

National Implementation Measures. These include:



- Government of Uganda has established inter-departmental processes and designated focal point officers in all line Ministries, Departments and Agencies related to the BWC and is in the final stage of transforming the departments' focal Point Officers into to National Technical Committee for the BWC with a secretariat for all conventions that Uganda is signatory to. This will enhance reports writing as a CBM.
- In 2020, Uganda designated a National Focal Point (NFP) who has benefited from the ISU training and has worked towards coordinating the national implementation of the Convention especially working towards Confidence Building Measures (CBM).
- Uganda has promoted Biosafety and Biosecurity (BSBS), linking Public Health to security, and participated in the 2nd Joint External Evaluation (JEE) under the International Health Regulations (IHR) as a Confidence Building Measure (CBM).
- Biosafety and Biosecurity implementation in Uganda is done at the various MDA levels with central coordination and guidance provided by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). UNCST has developed guidelines for bio-banking and research.
- In 2022, Uganda undertook a One Health National Biosafety and Biosecurity Audit across facilities at different levels and has been working with partners to improve Bio-risk management implementation.
- Uganda has developed an extensive pathogen inventory for the human health sector and a national Technical Working Group (TWG) exists that includes members from intermediate levels.

National Laws and International Commitments. Uganda is improving the Legal Framework for BWC and BSBS implementation. A bill for the establishment of a regulatory framework for Biosafety and Biosecurity has been drafted and is awaiting presidential assent. When finalized, the bill will streamline who is/should be the policy arm for Biosafety and Biosecurity and facilitate the regulation of High Consequence Pathogens that is currently handled by different MDAs at the national level. It will also attract a dedicated budget for BSBS activities. Uganda has enacted several laws related to Biosafety and Biosecurity:

- Uganda Penal Code Act (Cap.120);
- The Animal Diseases Act, 31st December 2000;
- The Public Health Act, 2000;
- Plant Protection Act 2015;
- The National Environmental Act of 2019;
- The Water Act, 7th April 1997; and
- Anti-terrorism Act, 2002.

Regional level. At the regional level, Uganda subscribes to the East African Community Customs Management Act, 2004; transnational movement of prohibited and restricted goods (which include GMOs, hazardous wastes etc).

International level. At the international level, Uganda is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms which Uganda ratified on 9 Mar 2005. This augments implementation of the BWC.

Lessons from the recent Sudan Ebola Virus Response. Research and Development. The recent Sudan Ebola virus (SUDV) outbreak in Uganda has underscored the critical need for research and development in the field of high-threat pathogens like the SUDV. Drawing lessons from the rapid vaccine development during the COVID-19 pandemic, Uganda recognizes the importance of proactive investments in developing effective vaccines and therapeutics for SUDV. This aligns with our commitment to enhancing biosafety and biosecurity measures and highlights the necessity for international cooperation in research and development to effectively address and manage biological threats.

Rapid Diagnostic Tests and Therapeutics. The SUDV outbreak has also highlighted the challenges in timely diagnosis and treatment of such high-threat diseases. The current laboratory tests for Ebola take considerable time, which is a significant drawback for a highly infectious disease. Moreover, the absence of licensed effective therapeutics for SUDV, despite its high case-fatality ratio, calls for an urgent international collaborative effort in developing rapid diagnostic tests and effective treatment options. This effort is crucial in strengthening our national and global capacity to respond to biological threats promptly and effectively.

Strengthening Response and Preparedness. In response to the SUDV outbreak, there is a clear need for timely international support to build resilient communities and enhance preparedness for future outbreaks. This includes investments in tools and resources for sensitization of the population, rapid contact tracing, infection prevention, control, biosafety, and biosecurity. Uganda is committed to improving these areas and calls for increased international cooperation and support. Strengthening these aspects is vital for our national efforts and contributes significantly to global health security.

Lessons from the recently completed 2nd Joint External Evaluation. Utility of Metrics: GHS Index and IHR JEE. The Global Health Security (GHS) Index and the International Health Regulations (IHR) Joint External Evaluation (JEE) have been instrumental in assessing and enhancing our national capabilities in health security. These metrics provide a framework for continuous improvement, helping us identify gaps and prioritize areas for action in our health systems.

Comments on the BWC:

- **e-CBM Platform Updates.** We applaud the ISU and the UK's commitment to updating the e-CBM platform, including improved search functionality and automated translation for publicly available CBM submissions. These updates will significantly improve the accessibility of CBM data, facilitating better information sharing and transparency among States Parties.
- **Verification in the BWC Context.** Engaging substantively to build toward a common understanding of the purpose and scope of verification is essential. Our recent JEE experience underlines the importance of harmonizing assessment and reporting requirements. We advocate for improving the cost-benefit ratio for States Parties in terms of verification, aiming to reduce the burden while increasing the value derived from these processes.
- **Concerns about AI in Biology.** Uganda acknowledges the urgent need for a global forum to discuss the implications of AI in the field of biology. The rapid advancements in AI pose both opportunities and challenges in biosafety and biosecurity. We advocate for international dialogue and cooperation to address the ethical, safety, and security concerns arising from the intersection of AI and biological research.
- **Recognizing the Youth4BioSec Initiative.** Uganda acknowledges and supports the Youth4BioSec initiative, recognizing the vital role of youth in advancing biosafety and biosecurity. We propose and call for greater youth engagement in the field, as young professionals and scholars bring innovative perspectives and energy to addressing biological threats. Their involvement is crucial in shaping a resilient and responsive biosafety and biosecurity landscape for the future. Uganda encourages other States Parties to join in fostering and empowering youth participation in this critical area.
- **Recognizing the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) Women's Network and Women in BWC.** Uganda also recognizes the significant initiatives of the IFBA Women's Network of African Health Security Professionals and the Women in BWC exhibit at the 9th Review Conference. These initiatives highlight the crucial role of women in health security and biosafety. We call for more initiatives to engage and empower women in the field of biological weapons prevention and control. The involvement of women is essential for achieving a

comprehensive and inclusive approach to global health security, and Uganda supports efforts to increase their participation and leadership in this vital area.

Conclusion. In conclusion, Uganda expresses its appreciation to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and remains dedicated to upholding the principles of the Convention. We are committed to addressing the challenges ahead through comprehensive national strategies and international cooperation. We call for enhanced global efforts to ensure a safer, more secure world in the face of evolving biological threats and the emerging challenges posed by AI in biology, underpinned by robust international cooperation, a forward-looking science and technology review mechanism, and a commitment to transparency and information-sharing.
