



**Opening Remarks African Conference on the Biological Weapons
Convention**

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As delivered



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Professor Shaukat Abdulrazak, Principal Secretary, State Department for Science, Research and Innovation,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you at the first African Conference on the Biological Weapons Convention, the largest ever gathering of African States Parties to this landmark treaty.

At the outset, allow me to express my sincere gratitude to our gracious hosts, the Government of the Republic of Kenya, for their hospitality, unwavering support and tireless efforts that have made this conference possible.

Distinguished delegates,

This conference is both timely and highly significant.

We convene as the world celebrates two milestones: 100 years since the 1925 Geneva Protocol banned biological weapons; and 50 years since the Biological Weapons Convention prohibited their development, production, stockpiling, retention, and acquisition—acts rightly deemed as repugnant to the conscience of humanity.

While rising geopolitical tensions are putting multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament regimes under pressure, the norm against the use of disease as a weapon of war remains strong 50 years after the BWC's entry into force.

But we cannot afford complacency.

We are facing new and emerging threats that test our capacities and challenge our determination. Emerging technologies, such as synthetic biology and artificial intelligence, offer unprecedented opportunities for peaceful uses of the

life sciences. But they also lower the barriers to the acquisition of biological weapons.

If we are determined to maintain a world free of biological weapons, the international community must act decisively to preserve and strengthen the norm against them.

Today, 189 States are party to the BWC. But eight States, including five in Africa, still remain outside the Convention. Our collective commitment to the comprehensive and unequivocal ban on biological weapons will not be achieved until every State joins the Convention.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our newest African State Party, the Union of the Comoros, which acceded to the BWC in February this year; and encourage the remaining States currently working towards ratification or accession to finalise those processes without delay. By joining the community of States committed to a world free of biological weapons, you will not only reap the benefits of membership but will also make an invaluable contribution to the international community's efforts to combat weapons of mass destruction.

Distinguished delegates,

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated our collective vulnerability to disease that spreads rapidly across borders. Through its devastating impacts on health and wellbeing and the disruption of international travel and trade, the pandemic caused incalculable human, social and economic damage. It also highlighted the fundamental importance of full and effective implementation of the BWC.

The preparation and adoption of comprehensive national biosafety and biosecurity legislative and regulatory frameworks, effective interinstitutional and multisectoral coordination, and strong international, regional and

subregional cooperation, serve to equip States with the tools essential to prevent and prepare for biological threats, be they naturally occurring, accidental or deliberate.

Africa, which faces unique and diverse biosecurity challenges, has not only developed world-leading expertise in responding to biological incidents, but has also, in recent years, made tremendous progress towards comprehensive national implementation of the BWC. More States are adopting national biosecurity initiatives and preparing legislative and regulatory frameworks, designating national contact points, and submitting confidence-building measure reports.

While the Biological Weapons Convention is a fundamental pillar of the global peace and security architecture, implementation of its provisions must not be a handbrake on scientific and technological development. The Convention protects the right of States to the peaceful exchange of biological materials, technology, and information and calls upon States to approach national implementation in a manner that does not hamper economic or technological development.

The BWC should be seen as a tool that aims to protect the world from biological weapons while steering scientific and technological developments away from the paths of conflict and destruction and towards the service of humanity.

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this Conference, we will take stock of progress made towards the universalisation of the BWC and discuss a common vision for the full and effective implementation of the Convention across the continent.

You will also be encouraged to reflect on progress within the Working Group on the Strengthening of the BWC. I have been encouraged by the constructive discussions during recent Working Group sessions and am confident that your deliberations here in Nairobi will positively inform the upcoming seventh session and serve as a renewed basis for our collective endeavour to guarantee a world free of biological weapons. African countries stand to gain a lot from the package of measures before States Parties at the upcoming meeting. I urge you to support its adoption and the rapid implementation of its recommendations.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss if I did not thank the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, in particular Canada, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, for the generous and sustained support for the universalisation and comprehensive implementation of the BWC. Your contributions have supported the delivery of this conference, as well as more than 50 national, regional and subregional technical assistance and capacity building activities across Africa since 2022.

Finally, I would like once again to thank our hosts, the Government of Kenya, for their gracious welcome and warm hospitality, and His Excellency the Honourable Dr. Musalia Mudavadi for joining us here today.

I wish you all productive and fruitful discussions and thank you very much for your attention.