



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

Opening Remarks at the Young Women for Biosecurity Fellowship 2025

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As delivered



5 November 2025
New York

Ambassador Meyer,

Ambassador Cervone d'Urso,

Young Women for Biosecurity Fellows,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, I am really pleased to join you at the launch of this special initiative, which seeks to engage young women working at the forefront of biosecurity.

I would like to express my appreciation to the European Union for its continued and indeed sustained support to the Biological Weapons Convention, including related to youth engagement efforts, which has made this unique edition of the Youth for Biosecurity initiative possible.

As the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention will hopefully soon reach agreement on consolidating and safeguarding this key Convention, it is more important than ever to bring in the views and voices of emerging leaders like yourselves. Congratulations on your selection for this programme. You were chosen from a vast number of diverse and highly competitive applications for your demonstrated expertise, leadership and motivation.

It is not by coincidence that we have launched a special programme dedicated to engaging with, and amplifying efforts by, young women scientists. This year marks three key milestones: 25 years of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the BWC's 50th anniversary, and the centenary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. These anniversaries remind us why it is so important to bring in diverse, new ideas from across generations and regions to help secure a future in which the use of biological weapons is not only unthinkable - but also impossible.

So, as I often say, ensuring women's full, effective and meaningful participation in disarmament is not only the right thing to do. It is also the smart thing to do. Disarmament without the full participation of women is a half-measure, missing half of the insight, half the reach, and half the solutions. Diverse and inclusive leadership is central to how we transform international peace and security, making it more durable, and more attuned to the realities on the ground. It enables us to capitalize on all the expertise we hold in order to develop innovative approaches to address the pressing security challenges of today, and also tomorrow. It is therefore a pleasure to see you all here: a cohort of ambitious and forward-looking experts who will support our efforts to facilitate integrated and effective approaches for biosecurity.

For us in the Office for Disarmament Affairs, meaningful youth engagement remains a key priority. Young people bring urgency, innovation, and forward thinking to disarmament, qualities that we cannot afford to ignore. Given that young people make up over half of the world's population today, it is essential to create space for them to meaningfully contribute to the advancement of global disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts. That is at the heart of our Disarmament Education Strategy, which was launched in 2022.

Dear Young Women for Biosecurity fellows,

Today, you are joining an active and innovative network of over 140 alumni from 56 countries, who continue to develop and pursue sustainable solutions to current and future biosecurity challenges.

Since its inception in 2019, the Youth for Biosecurity Initiative has created numerous documents that capture the passion and forward-thinking of emerging professionals, including the Youth Declaration for Biosecurity. Now, you too have been presented with this unique platform to work with your peers, to build on your ideas and provide fresh thinking to the important conversations shaping

the future of the BWC.

I encourage you to fully grasp the opportunity presented to you. Ask questions. Collaborate. Turn your dedication to biosecurity into actual actions. Take what you learn here and share it with your communities, in your home countries, professional spheres, and personal networks.

You belong at the heart of disarmament, not as mere observers, but as its architects. Disarmament isn't just about weapons. It's about reimagining society, security, dignity, and justice. And that reimagining demands your voice as well.

So: Be ambitious and speak up. Your voice definitely matters.

My team in Geneva is looking forward to welcoming you in December to take part in the seventh session of the Working Group and to connect you with the Geneva-based community of experts and organizations.

I wish you an enriching and productive time with the Fellowship Programme and I look forward to your contributions. Thank you.