



Remarks to Open the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship 2026

**Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

As delivered



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New York

Your Excellency, Ambassador Cervone,

Dear Youth for Biosecurity Fellows first and foremost,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you from New York at the official launch of the fourth edition of the Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship Programme.

I obviously would like to express my appreciation first of all to the European Union for its support for this year's programme, and for its continued leadership on youth engagement under the Biological Weapons Convention, or BWC. Thank you so very much.

As the Working Group on the Strengthening of the BWC enters a crucial and defining stage, it is essential for the next generation of practitioners and experts to be informed and also engaged on the issues under discussion – especially as they will contribute to the process.

And congratulations to our new cohort of Youth for Biosecurity Fellows!

You were chosen from over 900 applications from 92 different countries. It was a tough selection process, and you should feel pride for being selected – as well as of your previous experiences that have brought you here. Congratulations!

Too often, young people, especially from the Global South, have little opportunity to participate in the discussions under the BWC. And that is why I am delighted to see such a geographically diverse and gender-balanced group of emerging leaders. I feel assured that your insights and your ideas will contribute to our shared goal of a world free of biological weapons.

At my Office, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, meaningful youth engagement is a key priority. As young people make up over half of the world's population, 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, launched in 2022, which has inspired multiple youth empowerment and educational activities conducted across our headquarters, regional offices and centres as well.

As the UN Secretary-General highlighted last year on the International Youth Day, societies thrive when young people have the space to lead. We must ensure youth are included in decisions that shape their lives, particularly when it comes to building peace.

Dear Youth for Biosecurity Fellows,

Today, you are joining an active network of over 140 alumni from 56 countries. This network continues to develop and pursue sustainable solutions to current and future biosecurity challenges. Since its inception in 2019, the Youth for Biosecurity programme has inspired numerous initiatives that capture the passion and innovation of emerging professionals. As one participant remarked, “this programme is not just a learning experience but a call to action.” And that is so true.

Now, it’s your turn to build on their ideas and bring fresh thinking to the important conversations shaping the future of the BWC.

From the outset, I encourage you to dive in. To ask questions and collaborate with one another to find ways to transform your dedication for biosecurity into action. I encourage you to take what you learn from this programme and share it with your communities and professional networks in your home countries and beyond.

My team in Geneva is really looking forward to welcoming you there in August to observe the ninth session of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the BWC, and to connect you with Geneva-based experts and organizations.

I wish you an enriching and informative time as you begin your journey as a Youth for Biosecurity Fellow, and I really look forward to your contributions.

Thank you very much for your attention and good luck

I wish you a successful meeting.
