

**Statement to Biological Weapons Convention
MSP, Geneva 11-13 December 2023**



Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives,

King's College London aligns itself with the joint NGO statement. In this statement, we would like to elaborate some of King's recent activities that help support and strengthen the BWC.

Mr Chair,

It is generally a good assumption that disease outbreaks are naturally occurring and not the result of deliberate attempts to create them. But sometimes, a natural origin should not be taken for granted. A conflict setting would be one such situation.

In ambiguous outbreaks, it is critical to respond assertively. Governments need to move fast to establish the facts and to maintain public confidence in health services. Partnering with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, PACT, USAID and the Government of Ukraine, King's College London is delivering training to public health officials in Ukraine on ambiguous disease outbreaks and how to effectively respond to them.

Mr Chair,

The global biological risk landscape is rapidly evolving. A key element is the rise in numbers of maximum containment laboratories around the world. Together with George Mason University, King's College London has been mapping the increase in these facilities, along with the biorisk management policies of the countries that host them. Our 2023 report provided a wealth of data and concluded, amongst other things, that the boom in the number of labs handling the most dangerous pathogens has not been matched by sufficient levels of biosafety and biosecurity oversight.

Another element of the evolving risk landscape is the increase in high-risk pathogen research, especially work on microbes and viruses with pandemic potential. Partnering with *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, King's is leading a taskforce of international experts to consider responsible and sustainable research practices. We will deliver our report at United Nations headquarters in winter 2024.

A last element of the evolving biological risk landscape that we want to highlight is disinformation. Disinformation about public health labs supported through BWC Article X assistance and cooperation initiatives continues apace. While there is no substance to the allegations, the potential consequences of the false claims remain significant as the joint NGO statement outlined. Partnering with Global Affairs Canada and the Global Partnership, King's College London is developing a resource for disarmament diplomats, national policymakers and institutions to learn more about disinformation on biological weapons, and WMD more generally, as well as how to respond effectively.

Finally, Mr Chair,

Verification is one of the enduring challenges to the BWC and we welcome the resumption of discussions on verification in the Working Group last week. In advance of the discussions, King's College London partnered with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and the Governments of Switzerland and the Netherlands, to train Geneva-based diplomats on BWC verification, and we thank the many of you who attended for your engagement. We are also partnering with VERTIC and the US Government to develop a set of concrete, observable indicators of possible biological weapons activities that we hope will add value to the Working Group deliberations. We look forward to briefing you on the findings of that project in due course. For now, we thank you for your attention.

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