

Statement on Biological Weapons
UN General Assembly First Committee
New York
16 October 2024

Prepared by Dr Filippa Lentzos and Dr Jez Littlewood, King's College London
Delivered by Nilofar Nori, Norwegian Peace Council

Madam Chair,

Congratulations on your appointment as the first female PR presiding over this important committee. You are an inspiration to so many of us.

Madam Chair,

We welcome the many delegation statements underscoring the importance of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the need to strengthen this key disarmament treaty. Taking stock as we approach the halfway-mark of the Working Group to Strengthen the BWC, we see three different approaches emerging.

The first is a traditional arms control approach centred on a multilaterally negotiated, legally-binding instrument. In other words, a return to the negotiations of a BWC Protocol.

The second is a pragmatic approach that is identifying ways to improve and enhance implementation of the BWC. It is not pre-judging or committing to how that might be achieved; it may involve a range of approaches and could include, at some point in the future, also a legally-binding instrument.

The third approach is more amorphous and the least developed. It is built on a series of actions and practical measures by states parties that cumulatively move implementation of the Convention forward through national, bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral initiatives. It involves multilateralism as one component, but it also encourages adjacent initiatives to exist and flourish, enabling states parties and other stakeholders, to opt in to actions and measures depending on their commitments and preferences.

Madam Chair,

The task before the working group is complex. The principal substantive challenge, as we see it, is the legally-binding approach. If the Protocol of the past, or some new variant of it, is the only acceptable way forward for a few states it will likely doom any chance of a Working Group consensus report on recommendations. Equally, on-going efforts must be made to ensure that opposition to a single, legally-binding agreement is not opposition to any legal mechanism as a component of a way forward after 2027. Flexibility will be required by all states parties.

Also necessary will be a commitment by all who want to strengthen the Convention to spend more resources. There is simply no feasible way to strengthen the Convention in the future without a commitment to more meetings, more institutional support, and more staff for the Implementation Support Unit.

Madame Chair,

There is important work ahead for BWC states parties, and no effort should be spared to strengthen this critical treaty. Civil society, academia and other experts stand ready to provide support.

We thank you for your attention.