

STATEMENT ON BW DISINFORMATION

UNGA FIRST COMMITTEE | OCTOBER 2023



Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives:

The norm against using biology and disease as weapons of war remains strong, with the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) at the core of the international security policy framework. However, recent political developments, alongside rapid scientific and technological advances, underscore the importance of upholding and further strengthening that norm. Notably, technical barriers to developing biological weapons continue to come down and new possibilities to use biology to cause harm are opening up. In this context, this session of UNGA First Committee presents an important opportunity to heighten the political costs of undermining the norm. States should not only reaffirm commitments to the BWC and the 1925 Geneva Protocol, but also report on measures taken to implement and strengthen BWC provisions.

Mr Chair,

Disinformation, by certain states about public health labs in conflict zones that are 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. First Committee delegations should condemn health security information manipulation and disinformation about BWC compliance. These allegations generate uncertainty. They may erode confidence in essential public health infrastructure. They may significantly hamper global biosafety and biosecurity efforts. And they could seriously undermine development aid and cooperation efforts on peaceful biological research.

Finally, Mr Chair,

Genomic science is driving a vast expansion in genomic data. That data can be put to good use, including for personalised diagnostics and treatments. But used differently, that personal data can also be put to nefarious uses, such as surveillance, tracking and influence programmes, suppression, and even targeted weapons. To address biological harms beyond inflicting disease, First Committee delegations should initiate discussion on how best to build frameworks and capacities to ensure responsible bio-innovation for the future. Thank you for your attention.

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