



UK Mission
Geneva

**BIOLGOICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION MEETING OF EXPERTS 2020, MX1 ON
COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE**

**GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP SIGNATURE INITIATIVE TO MITIGATE BIOLOGICAL
THREATS IN AFRICA: STATEMENT TO THE BTWC MX1 BY THE UK GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP CHAIR**

**AGENDA ITEM 9: Promotion of capacity building, through international
cooperation, in biosafety and biosecurity and for detecting, reporting and
responding to outbreaks of infectious disease or biological weapons attacks,
including in the areas of preparedness, response, and crisis management and
mitigation**

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

Ambassador Aidan Liddle
Geneva, 31 August 2021

I would like to make a statement on behalf of the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. The Global Partnership is G7-led and comprises 30 member countries and the European Union.

The Global Partnership is an international security initiative with a mandate to prevent the acquisition or use of biological and other weapons and materials of mass destruction for hostile purposes. Established in 2002, it has a proven track record of working at the “health-security interface” with human and animal health partners in many countries of the world to prevent, detect and respond to threats posed by high-consequence pathogens, whether these threats are natural, accidental or deliberate in origin. The Global Partnership focuses on programming and coordination to deliver the most effective outcomes.

Global Partnership members have worked with partner countries and organisations in Africa for many years to strengthen capacities to prevent, detect and respond to biological threats. In 2020, the Global Partnership agreed to develop a Signature Initiative to Mitigate Deliberate Biological Threats in Africa. The aim of the initiative, which is being developed and implemented in the closest collaboration with African partners, is to reduce bio-threats through aligning the activities of Global Partnership and African countries working towards the same goals. Such aligned activities help

to avoid unnecessary duplication, leverage each partner's respective strengths and can produce outcomes that are greater and more impactful than can be achieved by single countries through individual projects.

Initial informal discussions in 2020 between Global Partnership members and African partners concluded that the Signature Initiative was the right initiative, with the right partners at the right time. There was also general agreement on the nature and type of work that could be implemented under the Initiative.

Since then, as the current co-chairs of the Global Partnership's Biosecurity Working Group, the United Kingdom and Canada have been working with a variety of external stakeholders to further refine and define priority areas and objectives for the Signature Initiative, consistent with the Global Partnership's mandate and the priorities of African partners, including the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Through this process, four inter-connected pillars for the Signature Initiative have been identified, and are being addressed by four sub-working groups, each co-chaired by a Global Partnership representative and an African partner. These working groups are seeking to identify specific projects and activities which Global Partnership members and others could support with financial or non-financial contributions. They focus on areas which match the priorities many states and civil society actors share for the BTWC and global health communities and are designed to deliver progress in these areas. The working groups cover four topics.

First, Biosafety and Biosecurity.

The work of this group includes options for collaboration such as:

- enhancing the capacity of Africa CDC to promote and support biosafety and biosecurity;
- promoting sustainable laboratory capacity in Africa, possibly through support for a pilot training facility for engineering, maintenance and calibration of laboratory equipment and biological laboratories; and
- integrating strong and effective biosecurity and biosafety measures into disease outbreak response.

Second, National Governance Structures.

This working group seeks to support the development and implementation of national governance structures that will enforce, regulate and promote biosecurity and responsible conduct in the life sciences. It will also promote awareness-raising and outreach to parliamentarians and decision-makers in Africa concerning support for legislation, regulations and appropriate resourcing for biosafety and biosecurity.

Third, Surveillance and Epidemic Intelligence.

Focusing on the development and implementation of shared approaches for adopting, deploying and strengthening coherent bio-surveillance capabilities, systems, networks and capabilities to better detect, identify, confirm, and respond to infectious disease events, whether these are natural, accidental or deliberate in origin.

And fourth, Non-Proliferation.

The presence of high-consequence pathogens in Africa presents serious potential proliferation risks, which are heightened by the incomplete adoption and national implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, UNSCR 1540, and associated export and border control measures. This working group is focusing on addressing these issues, as well as the related need for promoting safe and secure biological science through education and awareness-raising.

Important progress has been made in developing these four elements of the Signature Initiative, including through engagement with the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, and individual African partner organisations and countries, relevant international and regional organisations, subject matter experts and implementing agencies.

The Global Partnership looks forward to continued collaboration with our many partners to identify and implement activities which we can jointly implement in order to build sustainable health-security capacity, increase the membership and strengthen the implementation of the BTWC, and achieve our shared objective of mitigating biological threats.

Thank you Mr Chair.

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