REPUBLIC OF KENYA

STATEMENT BY

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GENERAL DEBATE
Mr. Chairman

My delegation congratulates you on your assumption as Chair of the 2020 Meeting of States Parties of the Biological Weapons Convention and commends your able stewardship of this session. I assure you of my delegation’s full support.

Additionally, despite the delay occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, which delayed our work schedule, Kenya appreciates your efforts and those of the Implementation Support Unit in ensuring that this meeting takes place this year. Kenya looks forward to fruitful deliberations during this meeting.

Mr. Chairman

My Delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Azerbaijan on behalf of Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Chairman,

Kenya takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the successful implementation and realization of the objectives for which the Convention was founded, taking cognizance of the ravaging and dire effects of the COVID 19 Pandemic.

Kenya has continued to provide a timely annual report on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to the Implementation Support Unit. Kenya has also worked closely with the Implementation Support Unit in the universalization of the Convention by presenting on her implementation framework as a test case.

This year, Kenya seeks to engage and partner with various countries in the finalization of a Biosecurity Strategy that incorporates lessons learnt from the current unprecedented times as well as emerging biological threats. Youth advocacy and socialization on the Biological Weapons Convention will be a key strategic action of the final Biosecurity Strategy.

Mr. Chairman,

We applaud our fellow delegates and the BWC-Implementation Support Unit for their flexibility and resilience during these unparalleled times. We express our deepest sympathies for people everywhere impacted by COVID-19.
In the face of the ravaging effects of the global Covid-19 Pandemic, rapid advances and proliferation of science and technology centred on Artificial Intelligence and volatile geo-politics, Kenya requests for concerted efforts to prepare a common voice for BWC befitting these unique times. Such a common voice would generate high-level interest and also form an important pre-requisite for the upcoming Ninth Review Conference, and hence send an unequivocal message to the international community on the great importance of the BWC, and adherence to the same.

The BWC continues to be the cornerstone of international efforts to comprehensively prohibit biological and toxin weapons. In this regard, the Convention now needs to revamp its efforts by promoting the peaceful uses of biotechnology for enhanced food production, nutrition and human health. This can only be achieved by deliberate investment in research and development relating to the convention.

Investments in Research and Development will mitigate against the unintended conversion of bioproducts or plants into bioweapons. It is to be noted that increased travel, trade, and tourism associated with globalization and expansion of the human population have facilitated intentional and unintentional movement of many plant and animal species, and of microorganisms beyond the world’s natural bio-geographical barriers. Few of these species have turned “troublesome” by invading new regions and replacing the native fauna and fora of the new environment, and harmful to humans, plants and animals. Biological invasion is the non-indigenous, non-native, alien species of plants or animals that adversely affect habitat.

Kenya is currently dealing with biological invasion of the invasive plant *Prosopis juliflora* whose leaves have maimed local people and animals. Further, the invasive plant has inhibited seed germination and retarded the growth of beneficial plants locally grown in the same land. Owing to the seriousness of this invasion, the Kenya Forest Research Institute plans to establish a Centre of Excellence to mitigate against the unintended effects of this invasive weed.

Water hyacinth is yet another destructive plant which is an invasive aquatic macrophyte associated with major negative economic and ecological impacts to the Lake Victoria region. The hyacinth smothers aquatic life by deoxygenating the water, reducing the nutrients for young fish in sheltered
bays. It has also blocked supply intakes for the hydroelectric plant, consequently interrupting electrical power supply for entire regions.

Kenya’s socio-economic development is also detrimentally affected by an invasive toxic weed or field dodder, *Cuscuta campestris*, which has been projected to cut crop yields in Africa by 30% by 2029. Significant amounts of research funding are required to completely eradicate the weed and to mobilize farmers and policymakers to tackle the scourge.

Kenya has equally been faced with pests and diseases affecting plants. The maize lethal necrosis (MLN) disease of maize was first reported in Kenya in September 2011 and is caused by co-infection of maize with maize chlorotic mottle virus (MCMV) and one of several viruses from the Potyviridae, synergistically resulting in severely reduced or negligible yield. Over the past ten years, MLN has emerged in sub-Saharan East Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America, with large impacts on smallholder farmers directly impacting food security. Funds that would have otherwise been used for development have been directed to management of this disease which took long to identify and determine its management options including breeding for resistant and tolerant varieties and coordinating its management Africa-wide.

Further, aflatoxin remains a significant biological threat to Africa, emanating from stored maize. The amount of harvest that’s affected by aflatoxins varies each year, depending on the weather. Too little rain during cultivation (which weakens the crops’ natural defences against fungal infection), or excessive rain during harvest (which makes it difficult to dry the crops before storage), can lead to higher aflatoxin. According to WHO, aflatoxins can contaminate food crops and pose a serious health threat to humans and livestock. Additionally, aflatoxins also pose a significant economic burden, causing an estimated 25% or more of the world’s food crops to be destroyed annually. Large doses of aflatoxins lead to acute poisoning (aflatoxicosis) that can be life threatening, usually through damage to the liver. Outbreaks of acute liver failure (jaundice, lethargy, nausea, death), identified as aflatoxicosis, and subsequent death have been observed in human populations in recent times.
Mr. Chairman,

Moving forward, there is urgent an need for enhanced vigilance among member states through diagnostic and prophylactic measures that involve peer-based monitoring and assessment of the status of BWC implementation in member states, as well as cross-border collaboration. Such approach will proactively avert or mitigate against the potential catastrophic effects of emerging Biological Weapons and the next generation bioweapons to security, national cohesion, peace, prosperity, and the general well-being of citizenry.

The effects of Biological Weapons are known to spread rapidly beyond borders and result in multiple devastating effects that include tragic loss of lives, food shortages, environmental catastrophes, economic loss, and widespread illness, fear, and mistrust among the public and even between states.

Mr. Chairman

In-conclusion, Kenya reiterates its conviction to a world free of biological weapons and calls upon member states who have not ratified the Biological Weapons Convention to do so.

Once again Mr. Chairman, I reiterate my delegation’s full support.

I thank you for your attention.