Statement by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)

Biological Weapons Convention – Meeting of States Parties
Geneva, November 2021

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Colleagues,

Through our individual programs and projects, UNICRI is committed to collectively strengthening biosafety and biosecurity.

The EU CBRN Centre of Excellence (CoE) Initiative, funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by UNICRI, support 62 Partner Countries in 8 regions. Eight Regional Secretariats (located in Abu Dhabi, Algiers, Amman, Manila, Nairobi, Rabat, Tashkent and Tbilisi) play a direct role in capacity building by facilitating regional capacity-building projects that are building more robust and sustainable biosecurity communities and practices.

The Regional Secretariats equally serve as catalysts for collective action. Specifically, they play an important role in connecting donors, project implementers and national experts, helping strengthen coordination and effective programming.

In this connection, we welcome joint events and activities with other existing international projects, starting from the Signature Initiative to Mitigate Biological Threats in Africa under the umbrella of the Global Partnership.

I would like to add that, within the framework of the EU CBRN CoE Initiative, UNICRI started developing a series of action-oriented CBRN Forensic Guidebooks based on interest expressed by partner countries. The first Guidebook will be issued soon with the title “Prosecutors Guide to Chemical and Biological Crimes”. This Guidebook aims to provide police and civil prosecutors, and relevant investigative agencies, with guidance to support the successful prosecution of incidents involving the deliberate acquisition, production, transfer or use of a chemical or biological agent. Secondly, UNICRI, in partnership with INTERPOL, is planning to produce a Guidebook for law enforcement that includes modalities within the Chemical and Biological Crime Scene Management.
Moreover, UNICRI has supported the set-up of the first African CBRNE Master programme that will be launched within the EU CBRN CoE Initiative by the Université de Haute Alsace and the Université Internationale de Rabat in January 2022 in Rabat, Morocco. The CBRNE Master programme will convene 25 trainees from 8 African countries and allow for an enhancement of CBRN capacities in the region.

UNICRI is also committed to monitor risks and benefits associated to technology in the areas of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), big data analytics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, additive manufacturing and decentralized technologies, such as blockchain. In partnership with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) – UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Working Group on Emerging Threats and Critical Infrastructure Protection, UNICRI produced the report *Advances in Science and Technology to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Terrorism*.

The report analyses two aspects: first, the possible risks associated with the malicious use of science and technology to develop and deploy WMD, and second, scientific and technological solutions that can be used to fulfil United Nations Member States’ needs in terms of preventing and combatting WMD terrorism. Please contact me if you are interested to receive a copy of the report (francesco.marelli@un.org).

Finally, UNICRI, in cooperation with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), is facilitating the International Network on Biotechnology (INB), a global network of academic and research institutions committed to advancing education and raising-awareness about responsible life science. In the last year, we have focused on COVID-19 disinformation on social media, trying to understand how terrorists, violent extremists and organized criminal groups have taken advantage of the pandemic crisis to undermine trust in governments and, at the same time, to reinforce extremist narratives and recruitment strategies.

Thank you.