BTWC MSP 2021: STATEMENT BY THE UK ON BEHALF OF THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP SIGNATURE INITIATIVE TO MITIGATE BIOLOGICAL THREATS IN AFRICA

At the meeting of MX 1 on 31 August, I made 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, with a mandate to prevent the acquisition or use of biological and other weapons and materials of mass destruction for hostile purposes.

In my statement, I noted the Global Partnership's considerable experience 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. I noted also that the Global Partnership focuses on programming and coordination to deliver the most effective outcomes.

In that context, I highlighted that in 2020 the Global Partnership agreed to develop a Signature Initiative to Mitigate Deliberate Biological Threats in Africa. As the current co-chairs of the Global Partnership’s Biosecurity Working Group, the United Kingdom and Canada have been working closely with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and other African partners to develop the Initiative under four “pillars”, addressing: Biosafety and Biosecurity; National Governance Structures; Surveillance and Epidemic Intelligence; and Non-Proliferation.

I would like to provide an update on two recent developments.

Earlier this month a virtual conference was held on “Engaging public representatives in biosecurity and pandemic preparedness”. Participants in the conference, which was co-
funded by Canada and the United Kingdom, included Ministers and Parliamentarians from Africa, primarily South Africa, and comprised sessions on:

- Africa CDC’s Initiative on Biosafety and Biosecurity, regulatory environments, and model legislation.
- Advanced warning systems, epidemic intelligence, and resilience.
- Innovations in pandemic response counter-measures and the bioeconomy.
- Non-Proliferation.

The high level session on the first day included opening remarks by the Hon. Mathume Joseph Phaala, Minister of Health for South Africa, and keynote remarks by Dr Tedros Ghebreysus Adhanom, Director General of the WHO, and Dr Monique Eloit, Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). These distinguished speakers highlighted the importance of strengthening biosecurity in Africa, the need to work together in partnership, and the clear potential impact of the high consequence pathogens of most concern to the Global Partnership on national security in Africa and elsewhere.

The outcomes of the Conference included a Statement of “Principles for Strengthening Biological Security in Africa”, which aims to guide Signature Initiative efforts to build impactful and sustainable biosecurity, biosafety and biological risk management capabilities in and for Africa. These 6 principles, which are available on the website of the Global Partnership (www.gpwmd.com), include a commitment to “promote and strengthen multi-sectoral cooperation in biosecurity and biosafety on a national, regional and international basis, including through and in partnership with … the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention”.

Another important outcome of the Conference was the conclusion of an informal Dialogue Partnership between the Global Partnership and Africa CDC. This new informal Dialogue Partnership will bring a much-needed African perspective on deliberate biological threats and broader health-security challenges to the Global
Partnership table, and will further support our shared objective of strengthening health-security and mitigating biological threats in Africa.

The four working groups addressing the four “pillars” of the Initiative are making progress in identifying potential projects and activities that the Global Partnership could support; I would like to focus on the working group addressing non-proliferation. This working group has, in consultation with the BTWC ISU and African Partners, given priority to identifying the needs of African States in relation to the BTWC, and options for addressing them. Four specific areas of need have been identified:

- Universalisation of the Convention in Africa: 8 out of the 14 States that have not yet adhered to the BTWC are from the African continent.
- Enacting comprehensive legislation to implement the BTWC: many African States do not have such legislation in place.
- The preparation and submission of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs): 25 out of 46 African States Parties have never submitted a CBM.
- The establishment of BTWC National Contact Points: 19 African States Parties have not yet nominated a NCP.

Based on needs and requests for assistance expressed by African countries in the context of other projects and the Article X database, the BTWC ISU has developed a draft proposal for an outline package of activities that Global Partnership could fund in order to address these needs. This package envisages a comprehensive 4-year programme of work to implement it. These activities are consistent with, and complementary to, the Legal Framework developed by the Africa CDC. The next step is for the ISU to further refine the proposed activities in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, so that Global Partnership members in a position to do so can decide how best they are able to support the proposed activities. We believe that this project can provide effective help to African States Parties in strengthening implementation of the Convention in the continent. The Global Partnership looks forward to continuing to work closely with the ISU and African partners to develop and implement the project.
In the context of the Signature Initiative, I welcome also that the European Union is working on a new Decision providing substantial support to universalisation of the BWC in Africa, and to improving biosafety and biosecurity in Africa.

In January the United Kingdom and Canada will co-fund a Conference at Wilton Park, in the United Kingdom, which will focus on developing specific plans for implementing activities and projects in support of the Africa Biosecurity Signature Initiative. The Global Partnership looks forward to the continuation of the Initiative under the German Presidency in 2022.

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