

Statement on Biological Weapons
UN General Assembly First Committee
New York
13 October 2022

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Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives,

We are at a precarious point in time. The biological risk landscape is becoming more complicated and more challenging. Technical barriers to developing biological weapons are coming down and new possibilities to use biology to cause harm are opening up. At the same time, our disarmament tools are being actively undermined and hampered from evolving.

2022 has seen widespread disinformation about public health labs supported through BWC assistance and cooperation initiatives. These claims are nothing but lies, but the potential consequences of the allegations are still significant. They generate uncertainty. They may erode confidence in essential public health infrastructure. They may significantly undermine global biosafety and biosecurity efforts. And they could seriously undermine development aid and cooperation efforts on peaceful biological research.

Attempts to co-opt the General Assembly, the Security Council and the BWC as platforms to legitimise bioweapons disinformation must be vigorously rejected. There must be consequences to such blatant misuse of our multilateral institutions.

Several states have raised welcome concerns about bioweapons disinformation in their general debate statements. Yet the majority of states seem to prefer to avoid discussion of BWC compliance issues. At the formal consultative meeting of the BWC in September, less than half of eligible states attended the meeting and a third of the participants were silent. This level of non-involvement on an absolute key issue for the BWC, suggests most states parties are simply uninterested in the hard work of keeping the world free of biological weapons. This disinterest is a boon for disinformation and a real challenge for anyone seeking to strengthen the Convention.

In addition to reaffirming commitments to the BWC and the Geneva Protocol and to reporting on measures taken to implement and strengthen BWC provisions, delegations to First Committee must speak up and condemn disinformation campaigns targeted at peaceful cooperation among BWC states parties. Beyond First Committee, states must provide swift and strong rebuttals of baseless non-compliance claims at the upcoming BWC Review Conference later this year.

Thank you for your attention.