

Statement by Lela Bakanidze on behalf of the International Federation of Biosafety Associations to the Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, December 4-8, 2017, Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Representatives. It is a great honour to be invited to make a statement to the Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention which I am doing on behalf of the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA).

Mr. Chairman. The IFBA is a global community of 40 national and regional Biosafety Associations representing virtually every geographic region of the globe. We recognize the important role of non-governmental organizations in strengthening implementation of the Convention. Our members are working in partnership with national governments in developing biosafety and biosecurity strategies and guidelines, advancing biorisk management practices & procedures, and certifying the competency of biosafety professionals in the safe and secure handling of infectious disease agents. We also liaise regularly with the BWC Implementation Support Unit, the G8 Global Partnership, the UN 1540 Committee and others to ensure that efforts by our Members are well coordinated with the international multi-sectoral response to strengthen the BWC.

Mr. Chairman. Ensuring that individuals who handle biological materials have demonstrated competencies in biosafety and biosecurity is an essential component of the overall effort to reduce global health security risks. To date, 379 Professional Certifications have been awarded by the IFBA to individuals from 58 countries across the globe. Among these, 42 individuals have successfully earned their Professional Certification in Biosecurity, demonstrating their competency in the fundamental principles of the Convention and in the principles and practices of working securely with biological materials. Looking ahead, from our experience, we have found that it will be important to expand partnerships between civil society and national governments in meeting their international obligations under the BWC and in developing national biosafety and biosecurity frameworks. The IFBA is confident that with increased demonstration of professional competencies in BWC related issues, the level of involvement of our Member Associations in the implementation of the Convention will also continue to increase.

Finally, Mr. Chairman. It is important to stress that the approach taken must also be a balanced one, between regulatory approaches and self-governance. A good framework consists of multiple policy instruments that are complementary in meeting the set objectives and can include laws, standards, guidelines, codes of conduct, outreach, awareness raising, training and the independent certification of professional competency.

We call upon States Parties to consider these ideas to strengthen implementation of the Convention, and in particular, collaborating with professional associations and certifying the competency of individuals engaged in biosafety and biosecurity related issues.

Thank you for your attention.