

Information Note¹

- Event:** Workshop on ‘Promoting the Role of Women Parliamentarians in Africa in preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction’
- Organizer(s):** Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) in cooperation with the National Assembly of the Gambia
- Date and Venue:** 16-17 May 2019, Banjul, the Gambia
- Participants:** National participants: The Gambia, Zimbabwe, Mali, Togo, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Namibia, Senegal, Zambia, Chad, Tanzania, Guinea, United Kingdom
International organisations: 1540 Committee, Chair of the BWC 2019 Meeting of States Parties (video message); UN Resident Coordinator

Background

- Resolution 2235 (2016) acknowledges that parliamentarians have a key role in enacting the necessary legislation to implement the obligations of the resolution, and requests the 1540 Committee to continue to organize and participate in outreach events on the implementation of resolution 1540 (2004), including, as appropriate, inviting parliamentarians, as well as representatives of civil society, including industry and academia and to promote the refinement of these outreach efforts to focus on specific thematic and regional issues related to implementation.
- Resolution 2235 (2016) also re-emphasizes the importance for all States to implement fully and effectively Resolution 1540 (2004) and calls upon all States that have not yet presented a first report to submit such a report to the 1540 Committee without delay, and requests the Committee to make available its expertise to these States, as appropriate, to facilitate the submission of such reports.
- On 21 February 2019, Hon. Ms. Margareta Cederfelt, MP and President of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) sent an invitation to H.E. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani, Chair of 1540 Committee, inviting the Chair to participate in a PGA workshop on ‘Promoting the Role of Women Parliamentarians in Africa in Preventing the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction’ held in Banjul, The Gambia from 16-17 May 2019. This workshop was held under the aegis of PGA’s Global Parliamentary Campaign to Promote Universality and Implementation of the Biological and Toxin

¹ For information – not an official report. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the 1540 Committee nor the organisers or participants in the event.

Weapons Convention (BWC) and Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004). A particular focus of the workshop was highlighting the importance of greater engagement by Women Parliamentarians in this area, including the identification of concrete steps that can be taken.

Highlights and Discussions

The workshop was officially opened by Hon. Dawda Jawara, Member of the National Assembly of the Gambia. In his statement, he pointed out that the African continent was hampered by political, social and economic challenges. There were violent nonstate actors across Africa, engaging in illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The risks of proliferation of materials related to WMDs were also eminent. The National Assembly of the Gambia, together with Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and PGA, stood ready to promote adherence of international non-proliferation instruments.

Ms Sharon Wardle, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom to the Gambia, then delivered a statement. She noted that UK was one of the depositaries of the BWC and after over 40 years of its entry into force, the UK maintained a keen interest in the Convention. Its universalization and full implementation were of continued relevance to international security and a world free of WMDs. She urged the African countries that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

Ms Wardle's remarks were followed by remarks by Ms Seraphine Wakana, UN Resident Coordinator in the Gambia. She pointed out that the world had yet to succeed in getting rid of WMDs in minds and on the ground. The international community should work together to get rid of WMDs totally and make the world safer for all. The adverse impact of WMDs on women was more complex. Women parliamentarians were encouraged to engage with male colleagues. In getting rid of WMDs, women's voices matter.

Hon. Momodou L.K Sanneh, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia, concluded the opening session. In his remarks, he highlighted the importance of women's equal participation, at all levels, in the development of the country and called upon all participants to look into the role women play in preventing the proliferation of WMDs and controlling related materials in the continent. He also acknowledged that efforts to prevent the proliferation of WMDs and control over related materials were of great importance to prevent conflict, hence contributing to maintaining peace and security, promoting human rights and social justice.

After the opening session, the participants heard a presentation by the 1540 expert. The 1540 expert gave a thorough introduction to resolution 1540 (2004), focusing on obligations of member States to adopt and enforce appropriate effective laws to prohibit the activities under OP2 and to take and enforce effective domestic control measures over related materials under OP3. In the presentation, the expert also introduced the Committee's "toolkit" including

reporting, matrices and assistance mechanisms. The expert encouraged participants from the non-reporting States present at the workshop to facilitate the submission of their first national reports as requested by the resolution and pointed out the importance of providing updated information on national implementation of the resolution by States which have already submitted their first reports. The expert also talked about the essential role of parliamentarians in ensuring that the necessary legal instruments are in place to implement resolution 1540 (2004).

The participants then watched a video message delivered by Ambassador Yann Hwang, Ambassador of France and Chairperson of the Meeting of States Parties of the Biological Weapons Convention in 2019. In his statement, Ambassador Hwang noted the severe threat posed to humankind by the outbreak of communicable diseases, such as Ebola in Africa, and highlighted the potentially dramatic consequences through the deliberate release of biological agents or toxins by State or nonstate actors. He reminded the participants that there were growing concerns that nonstate actors, including terrorist groups, may obtain and use biological weapons and highlighted the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to take place at the national, regional and international levels. He then reiterated the BWC States Parties' support of parliamentarians' crucial role in advocating for their States to ratify or accede to the BWC and then implement it.

Following the two presentations, the participants engaged in active discussions to share their insights and experiences in enhancing the role of women parliamentarians in promoting peace and security within their respective Parliaments. They also briefed the workshop on their national implementation of the BWC and resolution 1540 (2004), identified challenges and discussed possible steps to be taken to promote the implementation of the two international legal instruments.

In the last plenary session, the participants discussed and adopted the Banjul Plan of Action (PoA). The PoA included a number of specific measures for participating parliamentarians to consider taking within their respective Parliaments to promote greater engagement by women parliamentarians on peace and security issues, in particular the universality and implementation of the BWC, and implementation of resolution 1540 (2004). In the PoA, the participants recognized the importance of the national implementation of resolution 1540 (2004) and express their determination, as lawmakers and advocates, to take steps that are necessary to promote, as appropriate, improved national implementation of the resolution.

In the PoA, the participants undertook to urge their respective Governments to fully implement resolution 1540 (2004), to meet their reporting requirements under both international frameworks, and explore the possibility of drafting and introducing new legislation to facilitate improved implementation of resolution 1540 (2004), etc.

Additional Comments

For further information, please contact the 1540 Committee experts by e-mail at 1540experts@un.org.