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Date18th June, 2020

Excellency,

I hope my letter finds you and all the members of your Permanent Missions in good health, in these uncertain times.

As you may be aware, I had the honour to be appointed as Chair of the upcoming Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in December 2020. And hasten to assure States Parties of my commitment to serve.

I would like to sincerely thank my regional group for nominating me to this important position. I extended my utmost appreciation for the invaluable support of my candidature.

I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all States Parties for their unwavering support in the assumption of this noble duty. I will, undoubtedly, rely on all delegations for their valuable input and cooperation in actualizing the work of the BWC in 2020.

When the 2019 BWC MSP concluded its Session, nothing could have prepared us for what lay ahead for the international community in 2020. The decisions taken then, still hold and it is incumbent upon us to actualize the 2020 BWC MSP.

We find ourselves in very difficult times. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our social, economic and practically every area of our lives. World over, governments continue to dedicate their efforts in addressing this pandemic. As the pandemic continues to be contained, we recognize that countries will emerge from it at different times. This will, therefore, determine the way we engage in order to achieve the BWC MSP 2020 agenda, the calendar of meetings and possible outcomes. As a return to normalcy seems to be emerging in Geneva, I wish to seize this chance to appraise you on the following issues that are pertinent to my Chairmanship of this important Convention:

1. Meetings of Experts

One of the most pressing issues on my agenda is the arrangements for the Meetings of Experts in just over two months' time. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant restrictions have had a significant impact on the calendar of intergovernmental meetings here in Geneva. As was agreed at last year's Meeting of States Parties, the Meetings of Experts are scheduled to take place from 25th August to 3rd September. While there has been recent easing of confinement measures in Switzerland and in some neighbouring countries, the virus continues to cause serious disruption in other parts of the world. It is therefore not clear that we can run the Meetings of Experts as we did in previous years, and the ability of experts from capitals to be physically present here in Geneva remains uncertain.

Given the uncertainty, I believe it is incumbent upon us to explore possible alternatives to the Meetings of Experts as originally scheduled. I am aware that some States Parties already have some ideas in mind, but any change to our agreed 2020 programme needs to be carefully considered and then agreed by consensus. As the Meetings of Experts are due to commence on 25th August, there is not much time left for us to make a decision on how to proceed. **I would therefore like to seek feedback from States Parties on the arrangements for the Meetings of Experts with a view to taking a decision soonest** so that the relevant UN services and, most importantly, your experts in capital, can plan accordingly. Please feel free to send any concrete suggestions directly to my Permanent Mission or via the Implementation Support Unit. In addition, I would welcome the opportunity to brief the three regional groups and hear feedback on this issue. I will be reaching out to the coordinators to see if briefings can be arranged in the coming weeks.

2. Nomination of Chairpersons for MXs 3, 4 and 5

The other pressing issue relating to the Meetings of Experts is the nomination of the Chairpersons. The two Chairs nominated by the Western Group, Mr Kimmo Laukkanen from Finland for MX1 and Mr Kazuhiro Nakai from Japan for MX2 have already been approved. However, nominations have not yet been received from the Eastern European Group to chair MX3 and MX4, nor from the NAM Group to chair MX5. I believe that we should strive to have all five Chairpersons in place when decisions are taken about the arrangements for the meetings. I would therefore kindly request the coordinators of the Eastern European Group and the NAM Group to redouble their efforts to identify individuals willing to chair MX3, MX4 and MX5. In this regard, **I would also like to encourage the coordinators to give due regard to gender issues, as we currently have an all-male bureau.**

3. BWC Meeting of States Parties

The Meeting of States Parties is scheduled to take place from 8th to 11th December 2020, in Geneva. It is my belief, that this meeting will be important as it will be the last meeting before the Ninth Review Conference slated to take place in 2021. Deliberations on issues pertinent to the Ninth Review Conference will be discussed at the MSP in December 2020. The convening of the MSP will also be predicated on the decision we make and on the prevailing circumstances at the time.

4. Ninth Review Conference

As you recall, Article XII of the BWC provides for the convening of a Conference of States Parties to review the operation of the Convention. In this regard, the work of the 2020 BWC MSP will be crucial in building the momentum towards the Ninth Review Conference. I am convinced that the Ninth Review Conference will provide an invaluable opportunity to reinforce the importance of the BWC in an increasingly complex global security environment.

5. Universalization of the BWC

As you are aware, the Convention now has 183 States Parties and has grown steadily in recent years. My mandate as MSP Chair requires me to promote the universalization of the Convention and I will, therefore, be reaching out to those countries which have not yet joined the BWC to understand their situation and encourage them to consider joining. While joining any international treaty is a sovereign national decision, the current pandemic has clearly demonstrated the need for international cooperation and solidarity in the face of disease outbreaks. This would certainly be the case in the event of the deliberate use of disease as a weapon. We should therefore continue to strive for universal adherence to the BWC and I would be happy to discuss any initiatives from States Parties and to support your efforts in this regard.

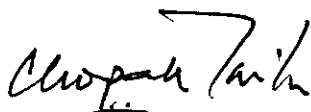
6. Financial Situation of the Convention

The financial situation of the Convention has improved in recent years, largely as a result of the package of financial measures adopted at the 2018 Meeting of States Parties. However, the fact remains that a significant number of States Parties have not paid their assessed contributions for 2020, and many also have outstanding amounts owed for previous years. Full and timely payment of assessed contributions is necessary in order for us to conduct the activities that we agreed to in our programme of work. I would therefore like to encourage all States Parties to fulfill the obligation to pay their assessed contributions for 2020 in full as soon as possible, and to request any States Parties with outstanding contributions from earlier years, to clear them as soon as possible.

Going forward, I intend to work in a transparent and inclusive manner throughout the course of this year. I would be happy to brief the regional groups, as and when requested and I am available for delegations to contact me privately via my Permanent Mission.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely,



H.E. Dr. Cleopa K. Mailu, EGH

Ambassador/Permanent Representative

of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations Office in Geneva

Chairperson of the 2020 BWC Meeting of States Parties

