

Agenda Items: 19, 20, and 21

The Global Health Council, in collaboration with the Nuclear Threat Initiative, commends WHO for their accomplishments over the past sixteen years to develop and implement laboratory biosafety guidance. The increasing number of outbreaks and laboratory capacity development efforts worldwide is evidence that this topic is one of great significance and the Secretariat's work has been and will continue to be, of critical importance.

While we are disappointed the Assembly will no longer receive regular reporting on this item, we understand the Executive Board's recommendation. We are confident the Secretariat will continue this critical work, providing Member States with support and direction. We strongly commend the recent release of the Laboratory Biosafety Manual, 4th edition, which provides important risk-based approaches to building biosafety, as well as national codes of practice.

We are, however, disappointed in the lack of focus on biosecurity in these efforts. Biosafety and biosecurity, including research oversight, must be addressed together as strong, whole-of-government systems enable countries to protect populations and counter biological threats, regardless of origin – natural, accidental, or intentional – while also fostering scientific progress and improving health security through international collaboration.

Upholding these systems and practices must remain a priority for the world, especially in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and future health emergencies. Safety and security should be key considerations as countries rapidly bolster their laboratory and disease surveillance surge capacities to combat COVID-19 and prepare against future biological threats.

We call on the Secretariat to more robustly incorporate biosecurity efforts into future reporting and development actions to strengthen country capacity, develop guidance materials, and instill normative standards globally. These efforts must be implemented in close coordination with other entities, such as the OIE, FAO, and UNODA. Additionally, WHO should draw upon considerable non-state actor expertise and capacity and continue to collaborate with external parties in a full and transparent manner.