

**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Development,
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their
Destruction**

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**Consideration of the provision of assistance and
coordination with relevant organizations upon
request by any State Party in the case of alleged
use of biological or toxin weapons, including
improving national capabilities for disease surveillance,
detection and diagnosis and public health systems.**

**The role of international organizations in the provision of
assistance and coordination in the case of alleged use of
biological or toxin weapons**

Submitted by the Implementation Support Unit

Summary

This paper summarizes the relevant mandates and activities of international organizations that might be called upon to act if an allegation was made as to the use of a biological or toxin weapon. It includes information on the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Criminal Police Organization, the Organization of American States, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Health Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health, and the United Nations.

I. Introduction

1. If an allegation was made that a biological or toxin weapon had been used, or that a disease event had been deliberately instigated, several different international organizations might be involved in either assisting in, or coordinating, response efforts.
2. Assistance and coordination efforts will likely include both health and security elements and require different types of organizations to work together.

3. This background paper gathers together information provided by several such international organizations and provides an overview of which organizations might be in a position to do what. There may be other relevant organizations not covered in this background paper. For example, details of relevant activities through the European Union will be detailed in a series of working papers submitted on by Belgium on behalf of the European Union.

II. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

A. Risk assessment

4. In view of its mandate to assist victims of conflict and other situations of violence, the ICRC's proactive approach, building on its experience of previous Nuclear, Radiological, Biological and Chemical (NRBC) events, started with a risk assessment and an assessment of what capacities exist to mount an effective response to assist the victims of an NRBC event.

5. In an assessment of the risk of use of NRBC weapons, the ICRC identified and refined 11 risks, each with its own implications for assisting victims and in terms of personnel health and security.¹ (Four of the risks are in the domain of biological weapons.) A lack of international capacity to assist victims of an NRBC event also became apparent even though many States have developed national capacities that could be deployed rapidly and effectively in response to a domestic NRBC event. Discussions of the deployment of such national capacities at an international level are still in their early stages.

B. Feasibility

6. The ICRC then carried out a feasibility project to examine the operational capacity that the ICRC should maintain, improve or acquire in order to assist victims of an NRBC event. It soon became apparent that the feasibility could not be considered without a reality based approach.²

C. NRBC- MORC

7. In 2009, based on the conclusions of the project, the ICRC decided to go ahead with the creation of a minimal operational response capacity (MORC) over a 5-year period (2010–2015). By developing this capacity, the ICRC aims to ensure the health and security of ICRC staff in an NRBC event, while maintaining operational continuity in the affected context(s) and assisting the victims to the extent possible.

8. The NRBC-MORC will comprise a core team of 2 to 3 people supported by various specialists from relevant fields, such as health, water/shelter, logistics, communication, and

¹ Dominique Loye and Robin Coupland, "Who will assist the victims of use of nuclear, radiological, biological or chemical weapons – and how?" *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 89 June 2007, p.333, on the ICRC website at:

http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/section_review_2007_866?OpenDocument

² Robin Coupland and Dominique Loye, "International assistance for victims of use of nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical weapons: time for a reality check?" *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 91, June 2009, p.329, on the ICRC website at:
<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/review-874-p329>

law. Their brief is both to look at the security, political and other issues an ICRC delegation would have to face in an NBRC event and to define the technical protective measures for ICRC staff. It is not a stand-alone capacity, but serves to provide NRBC operational and expert knowledge to ICRC operations that might face an NRBC event. The ICRC also expects its network of contacts to be extended and possible synergy to be developed with other actors in this field.

III. International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

9. In case of a biological incident, INTERPOL will provide service to the wide global law enforcement community by:

- (a) Providing secure communication (24/7) throughout a network, called “I24/7 network” connecting 188 member countries;
- (b) Access to police databases at INTERPOL; and
- (c) Providing operational police support services.

10. The following entities will be engaged in the process:

- (a) The Command and Coordination Centre (CCC) is a monitoring and coordinating information exchange: it is the first point of contact between member countries and the General Secretariat for all operational police activities. Located at the General Secretariat in Lyon, CCC is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in the INTERPOL’s four official languages: Arabic, English, French and Spanish.
- (b) The National Central Bureaus, which are connected with the General Secretariat, participate in all of INTERPOL’s activities, providing constant and active co-operation – compatible with the laws of their countries – so that INTERPOL can achieve its aims. Using I-24/7, connected entities can search and cross-check criminal data in a matter of seconds, with direct access to databases. At the request of member countries, INTERPOL circulates electronic notices that serve to alert police of fugitives, suspected terrorists, dangerous criminals, missing persons or weapons threats.
- (c) The Bioterrorism Prevention Unit: in case a country requests assistance, the Bioterrorism Prevention Unit can liaise with experts around the world in law enforcement, to respond to specific requests for assistance and advice, bearing in mind that the investigation remains a national prerogative.

IV. Organization of American States (OAS)

11. The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (OAS/CICTE) has established a unique network of National Points of Contact from each country. This network serves as a means of communicating with CICTE’s Secretariat and one another on technical issues. The system allows the Secretariat to directly communicate with the capitals, and vice versa, instead of following regular diplomatic channels—even if permanent missions are also informed about the communications with the NPC. This system, which is a model for other regions, would eventually allow an efficient exchange of information should a bioterrorist crisis situation arise.

12. In addition, in view of providing capacity building and technical assistance to OAS Member States in order to foster cooperation to effectively prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism, CICTE, through its Annual Work Plan, has developed programs in five main

counter-terrorism areas: critical infrastructure protection, border controls, legislative assistance and counter-terrorism financing, crisis management exercises, and policy development and international coordination. Within this framework, and in addition to the capacity building activities undertaken to effectively implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540, CICTE has developed a Bioterrorism Crisis Management Exercises project. Under that project, the CICTE Secretariat has undertaken, both at the national and sub-regional level, two Bioterrorism Crisis Management Exercises, one in Cancun, Mexico (November 14-19, 2009) and the other one in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago (March 10-12, 2010).

V. Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

13. The Assistance and Protection Branch develops and maintains a state of readiness for the OPCW to respond timely, effectively and adequately to requests for assistance under Article X of the Chemical Weapons Convention by:

- (a) Mobilising international mechanisms and coordinating international response to requests for assistance;
- (b) Building capacity in the OPCW to manage assistance from the international community and;
- (c) Coordinating and delivering assistance to the requesting State Party.

14. The role of the Branch is to plan and think strategically about potential needs and threats; to develop assistance packages; and to manage and coordinate their delivery when so required.

15. The responsibilities of the branch include:

- (a) Evaluation of the constraints of an international mechanism for the provision of assistance in the case of use or threat of use of chemical weapons, and advising States Parties and the Organization;
- (b) Maintaining an annual work plan for the implementation of the activities relating to assistance and protection;
- (c) Establishment of specific standards for developing and maintaining the capacity within the OPCW to manage the international community response to a call for assistance;
- (d) Capacity-building training courses to ensure that the Member States have adequate capacity to respond to the Organization's request for assistance;
- (e) Management of standard operating procedures enabling the Organization's response;
- (f) Organization of OPCW delivery of assistance exercises; and
- (g) Contact and cooperation with other relevant international organizations such as United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit, the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, etc., to ensure coherence of any joint plans for assistance.

VI. World Health Organization (WHO)

16. WHO's vision for international public health security is of a more secure world, ready to respond collectively to the threat of epidemics and other public health emergencies, both natural and man-made. This is in line with the framework of the International Health Regulations and is achieved through the proper preparation of the international community, including WHO itself. Such preparation includes readiness to detect and respond to all public health emergencies of potential international concern, including any alleged or confirmed deliberate use of a biological agent; or to act upon any request from a member state for public health assistance. This preparedness is based on two essential components:

- (a) An effective global system supporting disease control programmes in containing public health threats, able to carry out continuous global risk assessment, and prepared to respond to unexpected events with the potential for international relevance; and
- (b) Strong national public health systems able to maintain active surveillance of diseases and public health events; investigate detected events; report; assess public health risk; share information; and implement control measures.

17. WHO's policy in this area is defined by World Health Assembly Resolutions WHA54.14 and WHA55.16, The IHR(2005), the 2007 World Health Report 2007, and a 2004 document entitled Public response to biological and chemical weapons.

18. In preparing to manage public health emergencies, including events where there are allegations of intentional release of biological agents or toxins, WHO commits to:

- (a) Enhancing the existing Global Alert and Response System, improving the effectiveness of event management and communication with external bodies, including response procedures and mechanisms for the system's activation. WHO's Event Management System supports this response and other technical and operational capacities, by integrating international, regional and country information systems.
- (b) Supporting implementation of the IHR (2005), through WHO commitment to a programme of national capacity building based on "core capacities" for detection and response to public health risks and events that may constitute Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEICs).
- (c) Strengthening global, regional and national public health networks for managing public health risks of potential international concern, by improving the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) as well as through innovative global networks for risk reduction, readiness and intervention. In case of alleged use, such networks provide technical and operational resources for assisting member states.
- (d) Enhancing global, regional, national and international co-operation for the management of public health risks of international concern, assisting member states with management of potential risk during mass gatherings and other events of interest to terrorists (high visibility/high consequence events). Partnership is in place with UNODA, providing technical support to the investigative mechanism for alleged use (see the United Nations section below).
- (e) Global health leadership, collaboration and partnership in the public health response to alleged use, by developing a system for coordinating activities with

WHO Member States, and providing guidance and information to UN agencies, programmes and to specialized intergovernmental organizations.

19. These activities are carried out across a number of departments including Partnerships and UN Reform, Global Alert and Response, Food Safety, International Health Regulations, and Public Health and Environment.

VII. World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

20. The OIE has the mandate to improve animal health worldwide and plays a key role at the intergovernmental level in mitigating risks from animal diseases. OIE is the intergovernmental body that has the responsibility for transparency of the global animal disease situation and for setting the International Standards for detection and control of important animal diseases, including zoonoses.

21. If correctly implemented, OIE guidelines and recommendations can do a lot to increase the ability of OIE Member Countries and the international community to protect themselves against the threat of a bioterrorist incident. However, such protection depends on the diligence with which Member Countries follow the existing guidelines and recommendations. To mitigate the risk and impact from natural, accidental or deliberate introduction of animal diseases the capacity to implement existing methods of prevention, early disease detection, rapid response, and containment needs to be extended at national and international levels.

22. OIE and its partners are committed to strengthening cooperation at the international, regional, and national levels in terms of the 'one health' initiative. The mechanisms for detecting and responding to outbreaks of disease in animals are the same whether the origin of the outbreak is a natural event, an accidental release or a deliberate release. The threat from animal diseases being used as bioweapons is best mitigated by strengthening existing mechanisms for animal disease detection and control. OIE promotes the strengthening of veterinary services world wide so that Members are better able to comply with the existing international standards, have effective resources and legislation, and that they are governed properly. The OIE shares a common interest with its international partners in reducing biological threats from animal diseases, including zoonoses.

VIII. United Nations

23. The United Nations Secretary-General's mandate for investigation of alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin (CBT) weapons was established by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. In a number of resolutions, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to carry out promptly investigations in response to reports that may be brought to his attention by any Member State concerning the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons that may constitute a violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol or other relevant rules of customary international law in order to ascertain the facts of the matter, and to report promptly the results of any such investigation to all Member States"³.

24. In resolution 620 (1988), the Security Council also encouraged the Secretary-General "to carry out promptly investigations in response to allegations brought to his attention by any Member State concerning the possible use of chemical and bacteriological

3 Doc. A/RES/44/115B adopted without a vote on 15 December 1989

(biological) or toxin weapons that may constitute a violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol or other relevant rules of customary international law, in order to ascertain the facts of the matter, and to report the results”⁴.

25. The resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council established a mechanism for carrying out investigations of alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin weapons in a systematic, scientific and objective manner. Any member State, possessing information on possible use of CBT weapons, may bring a report of alleged use to the Secretary-General’s attention. In response to the report, the Secretary-General has the authority to launch an investigation including dispatching a fact-finding team to the site(s) of the alleged incident(s), to establish the facts of the incident(s) and to report to all Member States. The Secretary-General is not precluded from using additional information that may be brought to his attention by any other Member State on any aspect of possible use that would facilitate the conduct of the investigation.

26. Any Member State may designate qualified experts or laboratories whose names, qualifications and capabilities should be placed on the list maintained and periodically updated by the Secretary-General (the roster). In case a decision to conduct an investigation is taken, the Secretary-General would select a core team of qualified experts to carry out the investigation and notify laboratories whose services may be required to perform analysis of samples obtained in the course of the investigation.

27. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA) is facilitating the administrative and substantive support and coordination for the smooth functioning of the Secretary-General’s investigative mechanism including the conduct of on-site investigations and, as requested by resolution 60/288, update of the roster and technical guidelines and procedures.

4 Doc. S/RES/620 (1988) adopted unanimously on 26 August 1988