
**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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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**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.**

**Black ICE II bioterrorism response international
coordination exercise**

Submitted by Switzerland and the United States of America

I. Overview

1. Black ICE II was a two-day discussion-based tabletop exercise (TTX) intended to expand on the findings from the original Black ICE TTX conducted in 2006. The exercise was held in Montreux, Switzerland, on September 7-8, 2009. It brought together international and regional organizations, as well as representatives of national governments, to examine the complexities of a coordinated international response to a bioterrorist attack through the framework of a specific scenario. Black ICE II posited an aerosolized plague attack during an international sporting event, resulting in substantial numbers of illnesses not only in the city hosting the event, but subsequently in geographically disparate locations as attendees at the event returned to their homes. In order to examine public health-law enforcement interaction during a disease outbreak of suspicious but unknown origin, the exercise stipulated that the perpetrators did not immediately claim credit for the attack.

2. Deliberate use of disease as a weapon by non-state actors is increasingly recognized as a significant threat to international peace and security. Attacks disseminating anthrax through the United States mail system in 2001 and the discovery of an al Qaeda bioweapons laboratory in Afghanistan amply demonstrate that such actors possess both capability and intent to use biological weapons. Separately, experience with SARS and, more recently, pandemic influenza demonstrate the speed with which highly infectious pathogens can spread around the globe. Deliberate use of a contagious pathogen would

require a coordinated, multisectoral national and international response—and is a threat which cannot be ignored.

3. The overarching objective of this exercise was to assist the participating organizations to examine roles, engage in frank discussion, and identify issues and opportunities that bear on their collective capability to respond successfully to the challenges of a bioterrorism attack. The design and conduct of the exercise were intended to focus the discussion on specific questions and issues the sponsors considered significant, but was also flexible enough to allow participants to identify and explore new issues.

II. Key Findings

4. The degree and nature of international response to a bioterrorist attack will depend on the severity of the attack and other particulars. In principle, however, it could involve the public health, law enforcement, international transportation, humanitarian, and other sectors, as well as an international security/political response. These responses are likely to operate on different timelines and involve different players, with differing degrees of integration. Depending on the choice of agent and the nature of the attack, agencies with responsibilities for animal and plant health might also play an important role.

5. Although a bioterrorist attack with a contagious pathogen has potentially broad international implications, overall responsibility for response resides with the governments of affected states. International and regional organizations, as well as foreign governments may be in a position to offer, in accordance with their respective mandates, scientific advice or technical assistance, or to respond to appeals, but they play an advisory and/or supporting role. In cases where governance and national capacity are limited or have been overwhelmed, this situation may pose particular challenges.

6. Information flow is a key factor limiting effective response to bioterrorism for several reasons:

(a) A number of entities may be able to provide material support or expert advice, but the ability to provide the correct resources in a timely way will depend on the degree to which the state requesting assistance can rapidly and accurately assess and communicate its needs. Some organizations (e.g., ICRC, NATO, WHO) may be able to assist with rapid needs assessment.

(b) Foreign governments and international and regional organizations will likely reach out through multiple channels seeking information; this is in fact mandatory for some organizations under some circumstances; it is also often necessary if these entities are to be able to respond appropriately. However, it raises issues concerning the consistency and reliability of the information garnered. It may also overtax government agencies already struggling with a crisis situation.

(c) A state seeking assistance needs to be aware, in general terms, of the capabilities and limitations of the various organizations, in order to direct realistic and appropriate requests to the right places. There is no single comprehensive source governments can turn to for this capability at present. Several international or regional coordination and crisis management centers exist, but these largely coordinate response in a single sector or by a single entity. In other cases (for example, the European Union), cross-sectoral coordination and information-sharing systems exist; however, these systems are regional rather than global in scope. Participants explored several possible solutions to streamlining, standardizing, and improving communications and information flow between governments and

international organizations and among organizations, but believed that further examination of these issues was warranted.

7. An important theme was that the affected state's capacity to coordinate, and in particular the preparedness of its crisis management, public health, and law enforcement systems, will be important in determining the speed and effectiveness of response, underscoring *the importance of capacity-building and preparedness efforts*. Many international and regional organizations, including OAS, WHO, NATO, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, ICAO, and the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) have created useful guidance and/or conduct training and other capacity-building activities. Some of these activities focus specifically on bioterrorism; others on crisis management, pandemic preparedness, and other relevant capabilities. Participants agreed that wider use of these resources would enhance preparedness and should be encouraged. Some participants also suggested that additional resources for these activities would be important.

8. The humanitarian and relief organizations have established capabilities and procedures for coordinating and for responding to a wide range of disasters; WHO, similarly, has ample experience planning for and coordinating response to outbreaks of infectious disease. However, some of these organizations lack specific expertise, procedures, or capacity for operating in a CBRN environment. Depending on the particulars of the attack, *this situation could substantially limit international organizations' ability to respond to a bioterrorism event*.

9. Participants with law enforcement expertise emphasized the importance of close cooperation with public health officials in order to identify and investigate a suspicious outbreak at the earliest possible point. While cooperation between health and law enforcement entities at the international level is valuable, *this coordination is most essential at the national and local levels, since it permits law enforcement to both begin its own efforts at an early stage and reach out to INTERPOL, EUROPOL, or foreign government partners for support and assistance*.

10. Although it was not a specific aim, participants discussed the recommendations from the original Black ICE report at various points during the exercise, yielding important new insights and clarifications.

III. Key Recommendations

1. Information Exchange

11. Participants agreed that information management poses one of the most significant challenges in a potential bioterror incident. Specific tools for information sharing have proven very useful for some organizations and may provide useful models. In order to ensure rapid, accurate information flow, governments and international and regional organizations should develop processes for the exchange of information in a more standardized, streamlined, and transparent fashion, while maintaining flexibility.

2. Raising Awareness About International Response Capabilities

12. International and regional organizations and national governments that have capabilities that could be brought to bear in the event of a bioterrorist attack, or that offer relevant training and capacity building, should seek to make information about their roles and capabilities—and their limitations—more readily accessible. This should include clear

information about how to request such support. Ideally, clear, useful information on these capabilities and how to access them should be brought together in a single place.

3. Building National Capacity

13. States should assess key national capacities relevant to a bioterrorist attack, including public health, law enforcement, and crisis management, and seek to strengthen these capacities where necessary. States are encouraged to avail themselves of training, workshops, and other support offered by international and regional organizations and others. States are also encouraged to support these organizations—including through voluntary contributions or cost-sharing, where appropriate—in developing such training and assistance.

4. Operational procedures for working in a CBRN environment

14. Organizations that might play an on-the-ground role in responding to a bioterrorism event should review their regulations, procedures, and equipment to assess whether they would in fact be able to do so. Such organizations should consider exchanging information on their policies and procedures with a view to identifying best practices and to harmonizing them if necessary.
