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**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**

12 August 2010

English Only

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**2010 Meeting**

Geneva, 6–10 December 2010

**Meeting of Experts**

Geneva, 23–27 August 2010

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.**

**Moderators' summary of the International Workshop on  
Responding to the Alleged Use of Biological Weapons**

**Submitted by Belgium on behalf of the European Union**

1. As part of the European Union Joint Action in Support of the Biological Weapons Convention, Spain on behalf of the European Union, in cooperation with the EU Representative on Non-proliferation and Disarmament and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit co-hosted an *International Workshop on Responding to the Alleged Use of Biological Weapons* in Madrid, Spain, on 16-18 June 2010. The Workshop was organized in collaboration with the International Affairs and Foreign Policy Institute (INCIPE), a Spanish non-profit foundation based in Madrid.
2. The workshop was held in order to contribute to the discussion in the BWC intersessional topic "*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.*"
3. More than 40 representatives from EU Member States, third countries (Brazil, Canada, Cuba, the Philippines, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States of America), the EU institutions (Council of the EU) and international organizations (UNODA, WHO, OIE, FAO, ICRC, INTERPOL, OPCW) participated in the meeting. Substantive contributions were made by international and national experts from the entire spectrum of participants.
4. Participants discussed topics related to the alleged use of biological weapons, including preparedness, capacity building, emergency response, detection, investigation,

pursuing perpetrators and relevant technological and scientific developments. The discussion of each of these topics was begun with presentations from the perspective of a developed country, a developing country, and relevant international organizations.

5. The workshop did not negotiate any outcome document, but the moderators of the respective sessions of the workshop made the following observations:

- (a) Participants recognized that a release of a biological agent – whether accidental, deliberate, or natural, could be devastating, causing a major public health emergency and confronting communities with an extraordinary set of challenges. These challenges are inherent in the unique characteristics of biological weapons: they are relatively easy and inexpensive to acquire; they may spread across wide areas; they are hard to detect before an outbreak, which might be a factor in providing timely treatment; and, small quantities of an agent may have a potential to cause disproportionate damage by seriously disrupting community life, overwhelming public health systems, and bringing about widespread suffering, fear, panic, and death.
- (b) Topics that received the most attention included: public health preparedness and capacity building, national legislation, law enforcement, emergency response, training, detection, investigation and pursuit of perpetrators.
- (c) While the probability of a release of a biological weapon is low, participants recognized that intentions of particularly non-state groups to use one are real. Preparedness and capacity building are keys to any biological crisis management and all the relevant actors on international, regional, state, and local levels are required to put in place preventive measures. These include, inter alia, public awareness, national regulations and punitive measures to mitigate such threats.
- (d) The contemporary world is more than ever interconnected and diseases travel fast. A biological weapon scenario could most likely have a cross-border dimension. Preparedness and response mechanisms must be embedded with this assumption and cooperation, building of networks and good communication are imperative.
- (e) The role of international organizations is essential not only due to the fact that public health threats have no borders, but because the regime governing non-proliferation of biological weapons is not supported by any standing international bureaucratic structure – unlike nuclear and chemical weapons.
- (f) States have to prevent misuse of biological agents. To this end, it is necessary to put in place an appropriate regulatory framework, including bio-safety and bio-security, criminal law, administrative measures. Capacities on bio-safety and bio-security have to be developed. Bio-safety, bio-security and bio-risk management must be the highest priority for anyone handling pathogens of humans, as well as animals and plants. In addition to governmental and academic agencies and institutes, this also includes actors in the private sector such as the pharmaceutical industry, food industry, transportation industry, etc. The importance of creating a culture of bio-safety and bio-security was highlighted. EU assistance in support of the BTWC, bio-safety and bio-security was discussed.
- (g) The importance of implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) was recognized, with had benefits both for public health generally and for preparedness. It was highlighted that the EU Joint Action in support of the WHO activities, in particular the country demonstration project in Oman, could serve as a model for national bio-risk management in the context of implementation of the IHR.

(h) It was recognized that for achieving preparedness, there are both national and international roles and responsibilities. Mechanisms need to be clearly defined before a potential incident or attack occurs, as a prerequisite for responding with speed and effectiveness. The goals are to prevent and to reduce the impact of human, animal, and plant diseases and pests. Useful tools include: disease surveillance systems, alerts and early warning, regular updates of preparedness and response plans and contingency planning.

(i) In Europe, the EU is complementing the national responses. Structures are in place for coordination, capacity building and information exchange related to CBRN incidents. With the CBRN Action Plan, the EU has committed itself to better prevention, detection, preparedness and response to potential incidents and attacks.

(j) Forms of international cooperation and support were discussed in detail. As in the national context, the necessity of capacity building on an international level was stressed. International organizations can provide to States the following elements of cooperation and support: global disease surveillance, strengthening of national public health and laboratory systems, expertise, technical tools and support, disease and threat specific technical guidance, national regulations and standards, training, building capacity for crisis management, facilitating rapid response to crises, help with early detection and collecting epidemiological evidence etc. Overall, international organizations facilitate sharing of expertise, supplies and resources.

(k) In the previous years, international organizations have established networks of experts and laboratories, prepared guidelines for national health preparedness programs etc. They have further established a number of management centres worldwide and organized themselves in bio-safety networks, such as: GLaD – Global Laboratory Directory, GOARN, OFFLU – OIE/FAO Network of Expertise on Avian Influenza, FAO ECTAD Regional Units, Emergency Center for Transboundary Animal Diseases etc.

(l) Participating States cited examples of their investments of human and financial resources to enhance their bio-safety and bio-security standards. They shared information on the set of security challenges they are confronted with in their states and regions and on their response and capacity building. States are enacting new legislation and building cooperative and communication structures, which run vertically through the relevant institutions from local, regional to state levels.

(m) Participants shared information on adopting modalities for handling infectious outbreaks, developing systems of reporting, developing preparedness plans, communication channels etc. They further shared information on establishing response mechanisms and communication channels that need to be in place in case a response to a biological weapon's use is necessary. The participants recognized that in order to ensure an adequate response on national level to the use of a biological weapon, connectedness among a wide range of stakeholders – from sectors of health, justice, environment, commerce, agriculture, law enforcement, intelligence, media, and foreign affairs - is essential. It was recognized that often for adoption of appropriate legislature and other measures, an actual biological incident is a watershed event.

(n) Participants recognized that a release of a biological agent would fundamentally transform the context in which public health services are provided. A large disease outbreak has a potential to put a particular strain on public health system. Modalities of first response were discussed. Success of a first response

would depend on awareness of health services employees and existence of sufficient capacities – both in terms of expertise and material.

(o) Sensitizing public health providers to biological weapons use scenarios is a key element of any emergency response management and efforts are ongoing to overcome insufficient knowledge of and experience with handling potential effects of biological weapons. Public health providers must be educated about the diseases that might result from biological weapons use. Particular challenges can be posed by novel and exotic biological agents.

(p) In responding to alleged use of biological weapons, time and communication are of essence. Early detection of the event is a key, although still remains as one of the major challenges. First symptoms manifest themselves several days after victims have become infected and generally as non-specific. This is why cross-sector communication and vigilance cannot be overemphasized to recognize the emergence of unusual patterns. Cooperation and communication between the public health sector and law enforcement agencies is indispensable in order to detect, identify and respond to an unusual outbreak that might have an intentional origin, without unnecessary delay.

(q) Elements of investigation drew further attention of the participants. In case of use of a biological weapon, immediate priority would be given to assisting victims and to containment of the disease outbreak. Investigation would be secondary, but nevertheless crucial in order to understand the pattern of disease spread, to contain the outbreak, and to pursue perpetrators. The need to preserve and protect evidence during investigation of an alleged use was recognized.

(r) In case of an unusual and suspicious disease outbreak, international organizations can help with an investigation of the allegation. Participants discussed the UN Secretary-General's CBW investigation mechanism. This mechanism is currently being updated and the first ever training course "On the investigation of Chemical, Biological, Toxin Weapons Use" was held in Sweden 2009. The appendices to the technical guidelines and procedures were discussed in 2007 by a group of experts and representatives of international organizations.

(s) Participants discussed the arrangements under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the preparedness of OPCW for responding to a request for assistance in case of use or threat of use of chemical weapons. The required resources are partly held at the OPCW and partly by States Parties to the CWC. One noted problem is the inter-compatibility of equipment offered.

(t) Participants were informed about an upcoming exercise, ASSISTEX 3, organized by OPCW in October 2010 in Tunisia. The exercise is intended to provide a framework for evaluating the level of preparedness of the OPCW to deliver assistance, as well as the level of preparedness of the States Parties and their assistance-related assets.

(u) Participants were informed on the INTERPOL bioterrorism prevention programme and how to build capacity for law enforcement response. This included a discussion of the Train-the-Trainer sessions for police officers, health/medical representatives, customs officers and national crisis management staff and prosecutor. Further, table-top exercises for high level national leaders and coordinators of multilateral organizations, focused on how to detect and interdict as well as respond to potential criminal preparations prior to an attack, were presented.

(v) The participants were informed on an upcoming global bioterrorism exercise (Bioshield Global 2010) to be organized by the National Coordinator for

Counterterrorism (the Netherlands) and INTERPOL, and held in the Netherlands 16-18 November 2010.

(w) Participants agreed, while discussing recent bio incidents, that information sharing, cooperation and coordination of activities performed by different agencies are crucial for recognizing an event in order to be able to mount a successful response, including investigations.

(x) The participants discussed joint investigations by public health officials and criminal investigators. It was recognized that development and use of triggers and indicators for bio incidents are important, as well as early notification of responsive agencies on local and state level with a public health and law enforcement responsibility.

(y) Participants recognized that biological detection and analysis technology relevant to investigation and response to alleged BW use is a rapidly developing area. The participants discussed recently developed technologies for detecting a bio incident and identifying in detail the causative organism or substance. Portable, commercial detectors are becoming available and sophisticated technology for differentiation of microbial strains, having a key role in determining if attack has occurred and in attribution and response, is becoming increasingly automated and available.

(z) The participants agreed on the importance of high sensitivity and specificity of developed technologies, their versatility for analysis of different types of samples, being able to differentiate between biological agents endemic in a region or imported from other regions, as well as avoiding false positive results.

(aa) The participants recognised that there has been great progress in development of new technologies for protection of personnel, detection in the field, rapid and sensitive diagnosis, personal protective equipment, containment laboratories, new vaccines, more effective drugs and modern and effective decontamination tools and chemicals. However, it is absolutely critical to develop a bio-safety and bio-security practice and culture, and to offer training to agencies and individuals on how to apply these technologies.

(ab) In the context of the first response, a case study on decontamination preparedness was presented. If a 'hot spot' is identified, decontamination technology can be employed by the first responders to decontaminate potential casualties and restore the affected area. First responders comprise the police forces, civil protection corps, army forces, health services, fire brigades and others. Biological detection equipment can provide capability to identify certain agents. Fast availability of the decontamination equipment is an essential asset.

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