
**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.**

**United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
activities on international cooperation and assistance on
responding to alleged use of biological or toxin weapons**

**Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern
Ireland**

I. Introduction

1. The UK working paper entitled "*United Kingdom activities and capabilities for responding to a biological weapons attack*"¹ describes the UK's national activities and capabilities; this paper summarises some actions that the UK has taken and continues to take internationally in collaboration with other States Parties and international organisations.² Not least because infectious diseases, whether naturally occurring or deliberate, can readily cross borders, a response to the threat or actual use of biological weapons cannot be undertaken at a purely national level: it needs to be global and cooperative amongst States Parties and a broad range of international organisations. As we stated in our working paper at last year's Meeting of Experts, efforts to improve capacity building to combat infectious disease, especially surveillance and diagnosis, also helps strengthen the BTWC as the capabilities to identify naturally occurring outbreaks of disease

¹ BWC/MSP/2010/MX/WP.7

² The UK participates in international initiatives that will be presented during the Meeting of Experts by international organisations; these are not detailed in this paper.

are largely the same as those required to identify deliberate use of pathogens and toxins to cause disease in humans, animals and plants.³

II. CBRN terrorism: international responses

2. The UK supports a truly effective global effort to counter chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism. The Overseas CONTEST Group (OCG), chaired by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, coordinates the counter-terrorism work of UK government departments and agencies overseas. The UK CBRN community also has a range of international relationships to promote shared investments, mutual assistance, joint research and information exchange. The UK supports EU programmes, such as the EU CBRN Action Plan, and other international initiatives to help countries develop capabilities to stop the acquisition and use of CBRN materials for illegitimate purposes. We also participate actively in international events, for example, the Health Protection Agency (HPA) takes part in the design and execution of exercise and training programmes for international organisations.⁴ UK activities on international cooperation and assistance for improving capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems were reported at the 2009 Meeting of Experts.⁵

III. The G8 Global Partnership

3. Targeted assistance is provided by the UK's Biological Non-Proliferation Programme (part of the UK's contribution to the G8 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction), which aims to minimise the risks of misuse of dangerous biological agents or dual-use biological expertise. Projects are underway in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic and Iraq, many of them in coordination with the USA and Canada. Other projects are envisaged in these and other regions. Projects often involve cooperation between a country's biological institutes and UK bodies (such as HPA and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency - VLA), and help to improve disease surveillance, detection and diagnostics, biosafety and biosecurity, and to ensure a sustainable and legitimate future for institutes working on public, animal or plant health. This approach potentially has benefits for the institutes and their host governments, and also for the UK, through better understanding of new biological threats and in preparing for and responding to alleged use of biological or toxin weapons.

IV. The UN Secretary-General's mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical, biological and toxin weapons

4. The UK is a strong supporter of the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) mechanism for investigating allegations of chemical, biological or toxin weapons use that has been in place since 1990. This mechanism relies on UN member states nominating qualified experts to conduct investigations and designating laboratories to analyse any samples. The UK regularly updates its nominations to the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and currently has a number of experts and laboratories on the roster covering a wide range of relevant scientific and technical expertise. A UK expert participated in the first training course for qualified experts held in Sweden in 2009. The UK also supported, by provision

³ BWC/MSP/2009/MX/WP.3

⁴ <http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/EmergencyResponse/EmergencyResponseBooklet/>

⁵ BWC/MSP/2009/MX/WP.2

of expertise, the Group of Experts convened by the UNSG in 2007 to review the technical guidelines and procedures for investigation of alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin weapons.

5. The UK has undertaken activities to raise awareness amongst the nominated UK experts and their organisations about the background and operation of the mechanism. In May 2010, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) hosted a seminar to provide a forum for discussion of how the UNSG mechanism might operate, including both practical and policy issues. Discussions identified several questions concerning: the operation of the mechanism; safety and security of experts on mission; quality assessment of skills and capabilities; training; equipment; and financial and contractual issues, including insurance and liability. Following the seminar, the FCO prepared a policy paper outlining the background, detail and importance of the UNSG mechanism, and a set of 'frequently asked questions' addressing many of the issues that were raised at the seminar. These documents were distributed to the Chief Executives of relevant domestic nominating organisations to encourage continuing commitment to the UK support to the UNSG mechanism.

6. The UNSG mechanism provides the only international system for investigating cases of alleged BW use and thereby offers an independent and authoritative mechanism for gathering facts that could be used as a basis for further action. It offers the prospect of prompt and effective investigations that gather evidence that may help identify the origins of any attack, and may allow the UNSG to facilitate, as appropriate, provision of aid by the international community, which might help mitigate the effects. Thus the UK believes that it is important to ensure that this mechanism is effective, and continues to support the UNODA in its initiatives to do so; the UK would encourage other States Parties to support actively these efforts.

V. Conclusion

7. A key objective for UK activities is to strengthen international capabilities for responding to, and investigating allegations of, BW use. Much remains to be done and continued national and international efforts are required to sustain and improve capabilities.
