

# 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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English Only

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## 2010 Meeting

Geneva, 6–10 December 2010

Item 6 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**

## **Strengthening response capabilities in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons**

**Submitted by Japan on behalf of the "JACKSNNZ"<sup>1</sup>**

### **I. Introduction**

1. Enhancing the provision of assistance and coordination in cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons has long been a subject that contributes to the object and purpose of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). The intersessional process in 2004 resulted in useful discussion on this subject with the States Parties recognizing that “national preparedness and arrangements substantially contribute to international capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease”. Acknowledgment was also given to the relevance of the Secretary-General’s investigation mechanism, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution A/Res/45/57, for investigating cases of alleged BW use.

2. Following the discussions in 2004, at the 6th Review Conference in 2006, the States Parties confirmed the understanding that “the United Nations could play a coordinating role in providing assistance, with the help of States Parties as well as the appropriate intergovernmental organizations”, and that “States Parties’ national preparedness contribute to international capabilities for response, investigation and mitigation of outbreaks of disease, including those due to alleged use of biological or toxin weapons.”

3. Since 2006 there has been greater acceptance of the implications of the link between biological weapons-related security issues and public health issues, as well as of the

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<sup>1</sup> Japan, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway, New Zealand

importance of regional cooperation and training for the development of national response capacities. While there is this acceptance among the States Parties, further work still needs to be carried out on the provision of assistance and coordination in cases of alleged use, particularly in the area of investigation and efforts to mitigate and control the after effects. The objective of this paper is to contribute to our collective efforts to strengthen response capabilities in such cases. It is also hoped that this paper will assist the States Parties in their preparation for the 7th Review Conference of the BTWC.

## **II. Efforts for effective investigation of outbreaks**

4. During the Meeting of Experts held in August this year, it became evident through the exchange of experiences that the establishment and maintenance of national mechanisms for surveillance and detection of disease outbreaks is considered an effective way for immediately responding to epidemics. To this end, it was recognized that a holistic approach, particularly inter-agency cooperation including the public health sector and law enforcement agencies, is important.

5. While a good number of States Parties have already established national mechanisms, given the ease with which biological and toxin agents can spread across borders, regional and international coordination is indispensable. Thus it is beneficial to strengthen collective efforts, make preparations to rapidly respond to alleged use and make an effort to ensure transparency regarding the biological-related activities of states on a steady basis.

## **III. Efforts to mitigate or control the after-effects of alleged use**

6. Prompt action to mitigate and control the after-effects of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons is equally critical. For this purpose, the Meeting of Experts in August also provided a useful opportunity for States Parties to share information on national capabilities, as well as for relevant international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health, or the Food and Agriculture Organization, to present information on their own capabilities. The Meeting also recognized the advantages of coordinated schemes among two or more countries and/or with international organizations. At the same time, some states indicated the need for assistance and cooperation in order to develop their national capacity in this area.

7. Maintaining these capabilities once they have been established is another challenge. During the same Meeting of Experts, the benefits of routine exercises were discussed in this connection. It was acknowledged that exercises with the broad participation of national, regional and international stakeholders, as well as the relevant international organizations not only maintain the readiness of response mechanisms but also strengthen networks of relevant players.

## **IV. Suggestions for consideration at the 7th BTWC Review Conference**

8. The 7th BTWC Review Conference in 2011 and the subsequent intersessional process offer the opportunity to continue the work and the understandings developed in 2010.

9. Developments in the life sciences, the continuing refinement and improvement of governments' and international organisations' practices as they relate to responding to and

mitigating against alleged use of biological and toxin weapons, and evolving sources of biothreat (including from possible bioterrorism) all suggest that issues relating to alleged use will have continuing relevance to States Parties. At the 7th Review Conference, States Parties should consider again including alleged use among the topics addressed during the 2012-2015 intersessional period.

10. The 7th Review Conference will provide an opportunity to enhance the existing confidence building measures (CBMs) as they relate to cases of alleged biological or toxin weapons use. States Parties should consider expanding the existing CBMs relevant to assistance and information on disease outbreaks to provide more detailed information on existing national capacities and practices and current levels of relevant cooperation among States Parties. This could encourage further enhancement of national capacities and improved information sharing and cooperation among States Parties.

11. Because timely investigation and prompt action to mitigate damage are essential in cases of alleged biological or toxin weapons use, strengthening such capabilities necessitates the provision of assistance and coordination at local, national, regional and international levels, including coordination within the UN system. The 6th BTWC Review Conference established an Implementation Support Unit (ISU), whose tasks include “facilitating communication among States Parties and, upon request, with international organizations”. Noting the provisions of BTWC Article VI, as well as the Secretary General’s investigation mechanism which provides a complementary tool for investigating cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, States Parties should consider reaffirming at the 7th BTWC Review Conference the importance of the ISU’s task in “facilitating communication among States Parties and, upon request, with international organizations”. They should also consider enhancing the ISU’s capacity to assist the UN in the matching of the needs of States Parties to available resources, specifically in the case of alleged use.

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