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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The Global Partnership Biosecurity Sub-Working Group in 2013: report of meetings held under the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presidency

Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

I. Introduction

1. The Global Partnership (GP) against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction was agreed at the G8 Summit in Kananaskis in 2002, with the core aim of coordinating programmes to prevent the acquisition of such weapons and materials by terrorists. The 2011 G8 Summit at Deauville agreed to extend the GP, with four areas of focus: nuclear and radiological security, biosecurity, scientist engagement, and facilitation of implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540.

2. In 2012, under the US Chair, Global Partnership members identified five "Deliverables" on biosecurity as the basis for programming action. These are:

(a) **Secure and account for materials that represent biological proliferation risks. Assistance includes implementing existing international and developing national systems for managing biological materials, including stores of pathogens/toxins that represent proliferation risks, in a safe and secure manner, with the goal that all nations may adhere to existing international standards and/or guidelines for biorisk management and oversight appropriate to their circumstances**.

(b) **Develop and maintain appropriate and effective measures to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the deliberate misuse of biological agents.** In recognition that full and effective implementation of international health regulations, standards and guidelines as well as national and international biosafety and biosecurity regulations contribute to preventing, preparing for, detecting, reporting, and responding to biological attacks, assistance includes building and strengthening sustainable national capacities to meet these requirements, taking into account multi-sectoral approaches.

(c) **Strengthen national and global networks to rapidly identify, confirm and respond to biological attacks.** Assistance includes supporting the identification and implementation of shared approaches for deploying and strengthening coherent national and global biosurveillance, information systems and networks to better detect, identify, confirm, and respond to biological attacks, with the ultimate goal of achieving near real-time identification and reporting for potential biological attacks.

(d) **Reinforce and strengthen biological non proliferation principles, practices and instruments.** Assistance includes promoting the universalisation and full implementation of existing non-proliferation obligations, such as under the BTWC, the 1925 Geneva Protocol and United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1540, and ensuring the effectiveness of existing tools, such as the UN Secretary General's mechanism (UNSG IAU), to investigate alleged uses of biological and chemical weapons.

(e) **Reduce proliferation risks through the advancement and promotion of safe and responsible conduct in the biological sciences.** Recognizing that, while life sciences research is essential to advances that underpin improvements in the health and safety of the public, animals, and the environment, some research may provide knowledge, information, products, or technologies that could be misused for harmful purposes. Assistance includes supporting implementation of practicable and shared approaches to advance safe and responsible conduct in the life sciences to lower these risks.

3. In 2013 the United Kingdom assumed the Chair of the GP and in that capacity hosted three meetings of the GP Biosecurity Sub-Working Group (BSWG). The first of these, held in February, addressed Deliverables 1 and 2; the second meeting in June focussed on Deliverables 3 and 4, whilst Deliverable 5 was tackled in the final meeting in October. Our main objective in all of these meetings was to highlight specific gaps in capabilities and capacities and to identify areas where GP members could make specific contributions, whether in kind or through financial donations, that could help plug these gaps and in so doing make a concrete difference to international biological security. Matching resources to projects was one of our key aims, and some progress was made here. The WHO, OIE and FAO were active participants in the meetings as were UNODA, UNIDIR, UNICRI and INTERPOL. These international organisations reported on their programmes and highlighted areas where they saw compelling capacity and capability shortfalls that need to be addressed. Academic experts and NGOs were also active participants. This Working Paper summarises the main outcomes and issues from these three meetings.

II. BSWG February 2013

4. Some of the main recurring themes to emerge in the discussions on the first two biosecurity Deliverables included:

(a) The **capabilities needed for detecting and responding to natural and man-made events are essentially the same**. Networks that might be created for rare events will atrophy through lack of use, whereas systems created for dealing with natural, man-made *and* accidental outbreaks of infectious disease are effective as well as enduring. They use the same basic tools.

(b) **Good and comprehensive infectious disease surveillance is crucial**. The early detection and characterisation of an outbreak are essential as this enables a prompt response to be put in place to contain the impact of outbreaks irrespective of origins. This helps reduce fatalities, sickness and the economic costs.

(c) We need to **think of security in broader terms rather than narrower more traditional ways** such as applied in the Cold War: 'One Health' for example is a key concept in this context. We should focus more on the requirements for capacity building rather than whether the source of the finance is in the health sector or the security sector.

(d) **Not everything need cost very large amounts of money**: FAO, OIE and WHO identified specific (low-cost) projects that would help address, build and sustain capacities and fill capability gaps.

5. The meeting identified some areas for follow-up action and support by GP members:

(a) **Support for biosecurity/biosafety legislation and guidance** e.g. translation of essential documents into major languages.

(b) **Developing and promoting good governance for biosafety associations**.

(c) **Enhancing security for dangerous pathogens**: sequestration and destruction of rinderpest virus being a particular priority.

(d) **Laboratory twinning** – expanding the geographical distribution of reference laboratories, especially in Central Asia and Africa.

(e) **OIE/FAO missions to help develop capacities in animal and plant health**, especially for early diagnosis, detection, characterisation.

(f) Support to fill **gaps in the implementation of the International Health Regulations**, especially in South-East Asia, Eastern Mediterranean and Africa.

III. BSWG June 2013

6. The June meeting focussed on biosecurity Deliverables 3 and 4, with the main themes to emerge from discussion and the areas for follow-up work as follows:

(a) **Early communication of speedy, accurate and reliable information about infectious disease outbreaks enables prompt and effective responses**; as part of this process we need to find ways of building trust in sources of information – their reliability and accuracy in particular.

(b) **Enhancing national, regional and international capacities of infectious disease surveillance networks is essential**. In this respect the interoperability between information networks was identified as an important measure in aiming for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to surveillance.

(c) **Regional networks are important for building capacities** – this means that those making progress can help build and work with neighbouring networks.

(d) **Inevitably much effort and time is still required to address gaps in capabilities** – e.g. a variation of the 'train the trainer' approach was highlighted as a potentially very useful means to train field epidemiologists effectively.

(e) **Effective national implementation of the BTWC faces continuing challenges**; with biosecurity remaining one of the weakest areas requiring attention.

(f) In many States Parties there are **still acute difficulties in establishing the necessary inter-ministerial co-operation and co-ordination required** for progress. This is perhaps the biggest hurdle to ensuring the effective drafting and implementation of legislation and associated measures to give full effect to the Convention in many States Parties. Sustained funding for assistance programmes and political support are needed to overcome these challenges.

(g) We still need to find ways of making the BTWC intersessional process more effective, and one way to do this would be by **encouraging more active participation in the meetings from those States Parties in receipt of Global Partnership assistance**.

(h) **Much work is needed to make the UNSG IAU mechanism for BW more operational**; there is a need for states to act as hosts for exercises to facilitate training of experts; command and control and effective interviewing are some of the key areas requiring attention.

IV. BSWG October 2013

7. The final meeting concentrated on biosecurity Deliverable 5, and focussed on five main topics falling under this heading: outreach to the academic world and dual-use awareness; developing dual-use education training course material and building sustainable education networks; initiation of an international Biotechnology Risk Observatory; how the BTWC helps advance biosecurity Deliverable 5; and whether we were missing any important issues and why. Main highlights of the discussions included:

(a) **Building security awareness raising requires time in universities** and elsewhere and there is still much more to do. The objective here is not to hamper scientific research, but rather to protect it: 'safeguarding science' is the key phrase.

(b) There are **considerable challenges in managing effectively risks posed by dual use research of concern in the life sciences** and other relevant disciplines. Problems will not be resolved, only managed.

(c) **Long term sustained efforts are needed across a broad range of scientific and engineering disciplines,** including promotion of education and awareness raising on dual use issues, biosecurity and the importance of the BTWC. There is also a need to include social scientists and ethicists.

(d) **The life sciences are growing, spreading and diversifying, further increasing difficulties of reaching out to the broad range of government, academic, industry and DIY scientists now involved**. Better risk assessment of projects at their outset is a better approach than control or redaction at the pre-publication stage. There is a need to understand and develop approaches to risk management.

(e) **A combination of 'top down' and 'bottom-up' approaches** is essential in promotion of education materials, awareness raising on dual-use and responsible conduct of science.

(f) The BTWC provides a forum as one global platform, but there is an institutional deficit as there is no IAEA or OPCW equivalent to help advance approaches. **Global Partnership members can help in advancing the issues discussed nationally and internationally and by continuing to support BTWC related projects** such as in engaging a wider range of countries/regions and translating education course materials.

V. Conclusion

8. The United Kingdom believes that these three meetings helped further Global Partnership members' understanding of the priority areas and challenges to be overcome in advancing the five biosecurity Deliverables. We have already seen further significant national contributions and commitments to relevant projects and programmes this year from the UK (reported separately in the EU Working Paper on Assistance and Cooperation), Canada, Finland, Germany and the United States. All of the Deliverables require sustained

commitment and action and their achievement will also help strengthen and deepen the implementation of Articles I, III, IV, V, VI, VII and X of the Convention.

9. The UK assesses that the GP has made a considerable and increasing contribution to strengthening international biological security over the ten years of its existence. Its activities have served to strengthen implementation of the BTWC in a variety of ways, especially in areas of biosafety, biosecurity and combating infectious diseases of humans, animals and plants. As the membership and geographical reach of the GP grows, and an increasing number of countries recognise the benefits of cooperation with each other and with the relevant international organisations, we look forward to continuing progress in this important international initiative.