

**Third Meeting
Geneva, 5-9 December 2005**

**Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 13-24 June 2005**

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Consideration of the content, promulgation, and adoption of codes of conduct for scientists

Existing Codes of Conduct which Refer to Biological and Toxin Weapons

Summary of Background Paper prepared by the Secretariat¹

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

United Nations and Specialised Agencies

1. There are already efforts being made within the United Nations framework to develop a code of conduct for scientists. It would appear that from its inception such a code was designed to reference unconventional weapons including biological and toxin weapons.
2. In October 2001 the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) established The Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism using precedents established in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1368 (2001) and 1373 (2001), as well as United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 56/1. The Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism compiled a Report addressing long-term strategic goals and recommendations for countermeasures aimed at preventing terrorism (Annex to A/57/273, S/2002/875). Of particular relevance are Recommendations 10 and 21. An Inter-Agency Consultative Meeting was held at UNESCO head quarters in Paris, on 26 February 2003, specifically to discuss Recommendations 10 and 21 of the Report.
3. One of the outcomes of this UN Inter-Agency meeting was a general recommendation towards *encouraging ethical codes of conduct for scientists and engineers and promoting ethics of science education and awareness*. In addition, it was recommended that *existing relevant*

¹/ This background paper has been prepared at the request of the Chairman. The contents of the paper are intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive, and to provide an overview and starting point for States Parties who may wish to conduct further research. Comments, additions and corrections from States Parties are welcome.

bodies such as COMEST [UNESCO's World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology] could in particular play a decisive role in fostering a continued dialogue on education and ethics of science, also recommending the specific involvement of the COMEST together with ICSU in the field of the responsibility of scientists. The meeting also recalled the *Declaration on Science and the Use of Scientific Knowledge* made at the World Conference on Science in 1999.

4. In 2003, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament formally requested the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), under the Co-operation Agreement between the two organizations, to assist the United Nations Secretariat in implementing recommendation 21. The ICGEB initiated a series of consultations with various National Academies of Science. The result was to be a draft *Code of Conduct for Scientists in Relation to the Safe and Ethical Use of Biological Sciences*. Building blocks, which could form the underlying principles of such a code, were presented to the Meeting of States Parties in December 2004.

World Health Organization (WHO)

5. The WHO *Laboratory biosafety manual (LBM)* provides a set of best practice scientific guidelines and is revised according to periodic risk assessments. The third edition, published in 2004 (<http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/biosafety/en/Biosafety7.pdf>), provides a reference for nations to assist them in developing and establishing national codes of practice for securing microbiological assets, yet ensuring their availability for clinical, research and epidemiological purposes. The third edition also introduces the concept of biosecurity and addresses new threats to public health from deliberate misuse and release of microbiological agents and toxins.

6. In 2004, the Programme for Preparedness for Deliberate Epidemics within the Department for Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Response (CSR) of the WHO, in collaboration with other WHO departments and non-WHO experts, worked on a background paper entitled *Life science research - Opportunities and risks for public health: Mapping the issues*. This paper aims at engaging dialogue with WHO Member States, the public health and life science communities, international and non-governmental organizations, the private and security sectors on the implications that life science research may have for global health security.

Other International Organizations

7. Other International Organizations have also engaged in the process of developing Codes of Conduct for Scientists. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has developed a series of general principles which it believes should underpin any such code. The ICRC has stopped short of using these principles to develop a code of conduct, but have used them to suggest a number of action points which could be considered during the development of such a code.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS, BODIES AND INSTITUTIONS

8. At least one international federation, the World Medical Association (WMA), has taken action on this issue. Although the WMA has not formally adopted a code of conduct for its members, in Washington, USA in 2002, the General Assembly of this federation adopted a declaration on the topic, which according to the organization's website, should be considered a policy document and therefore of particular relevance to its members. This document has become known as the Washington Declaration (<http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b1.htm>).

9. On the national level, a limited number of professional organisations do have codes of conduct that do refer to biological and toxin weapons. The Code of Ethics of the Australian Society for Microbiology (<http://www.theasm.com.au/>) is one example.

10. The months prior to the Meeting of Experts will also witness the creation of a new body, the International Council for the Life Sciences (ICLS), intended to be a forum for discussion of ethical issues in the life sciences. (<http://www.cbaci.org/nonp/projects.html>).

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS, BODIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Biotechnology

11. A number of the international, regional and national biotechnology federations and associations identified, which possessed codes of conduct available to the Secretariat, included specific mention of biological weapons. These included:

AusBiotech, Ltd.

http://www.ausbiotech.org/code_of_conduct.asp

EuropaBio

http://www.europabio.org/ethics_and_dialogue.htm

BIOTECCanada

<http://www.biotech.ca/EN/ethics.html>

Biotechnology Industry Organization

<http://www.bio.org/news/features/20011105.asp>

These codes of conduct adopt a similar approach in considering biological and toxin weapons, and opt for a general prohibition on the development of these weapons, as opposed to a detailed set of behavioural controls to prevent such development taking place.

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturing

12. At the global level, this industry is represented by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA). Although neither the IFPMA nor its members appear to have codes of conduct which refer to biological and toxin weapons (and are therefore considered in Background Paper 2) some other large pharmaceutical research and manufacturing entities do have such codes. For example, the Wellcome Trust, an independent

UK charity funding research to improve human and animal health, published a position statement on bioterrorism and biomedical research in November 2003 (http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/doc_WTD002767.html). This position statement included a number of decisions taken by the trust in regards to the research it funds, thus binding the conduct of not only those it employs but also those receiving its funding.
