

Formal Consultative 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 6 of the agenda

Respective outstanding questions by the Russian Federation to the United States and to Ukraine concerning the fulfilment of their respective obligations under the Convention in the context of the operation of biological laboratories in Ukraine

Questions to Ukraine regarding compliance with obligations under Part 1 of Article I of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BTWC), in the context of activities of biological laboratories

Submitted by the Russian Federation

1. Today, the occurrence of atypical and often disparate outbreaks of zoonotic diseases with high epidemic potential, such as COVID-19, monkey pox, as well as economically relevant diseases like the African swine fever and avian influenza all over the world inadvertently leads one to think about the intentional nature and look at their causes from the BTWC perspective.
2. The deteriorating epidemic situation acquires a special resonance in view of the attempts by a number of states (first of all, the United States) to unbalance the global security system that has been formed over decades, undermine the principles of its equality and indivisibility, and strengthen their military and political presence. Under the guise of providing assistance in developing national sanitary and epidemiological surveillance systems and combating the threat of bioterrorism and biological weapons proliferation, they have extended their influence to many states in various regions of the world, including some of the states of the former Soviet Union.
3. This enabled the United States to establish control over the sanitary and epidemiological situation, intellectual resources and ongoing biosafety research in strategically important regions, build large collections of pathogens, implement a system for their surveillance and replenishment from national collections of other countries.
4. The creation across the former Soviet Union of a network of biolaboratories that can be used to develop and store components of biological weapons directly threatens the national security of the Russian Federation. Unlike nuclear weapons, which are deployed on the territory of US partner countries from NATO, such policy in the biological sphere in fact allows Washington to approach the Russian borders unimpeded.
5. Reports from various sources claim that biological research activities have been carried out on the territory of Ukraine, including those commissioned by and in the interests of the United States. We have retrieved evidence, including more than two thousand pages



of documents, confirming that under control of the US administration, research was conducted in 46 laboratories in Ukraine involving pathogens of particularly dangerous and economically significant infections.

6. We would like to focus just on the key findings confirming the violation of BTWC Article I regarding the stockpiling of pathogens of types and in quantities that are inconsistent with prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes.

7. The scope and focus of the biological activities carried out on the territory of Ukraine that point to the breach of Article I (1) of the Convention are clearly visible in the internal document of the I.Mechnikov Anti-Plague Scientific and Research Institute in Odessa entitled "Report on the results of the inspection of the microbial strain collection of 8 February 2018."

8. A routine inspection of the institute was conducted by a group of experts from the Ukrainian Health Ministry on 27-28 December 2018. The report on the structure and condition of the research facility says that the total number of microbial strains in the national collection is 654, including pathogens of anthrax –32 strains, brucellosis – 11 strains, tularemia – 189 strains, cholera – 422 strains.

9. There were eight cryogenic containers in the storage facility not belonging to the national collection, which contained viral pathogens, including tick-borne encephalitis viruses well as unidentified arthroviruses, of a total number of 596 items.

10. There were 66 containers with 497 cholera agents' storage units, 149 tularemia agents' storage units, 279 brucellosis agents' storage units, 32 anthrax agents' storage units at the storage facility.

11. The report notes that the Institute has no documented information regarding the actual condition of the strains in the collection, nor does it have any evidence to support the need to store a large number of tubes with the same strains of different passages.

12. In the absence of aggravation of the situation with these diseases in Ukraine in recent years, the assortment and accumulated volumes of biological agents cast doubt as to their intended use for preventive, protective or other peaceful purposes in the framework of routine research work. Despite such a significant amount of accumulated disease-causing biological materials, there is no convincing evidence of their use for such research purposes. The report concludes that the Institute conducted only three research studies as part of its core research activities in 2018, with only one of them using the living cultures collection (bacterial museum), namely tularemia strains.

13. At the same time, the absence of a report on research results achieved using the facility in 2017 was noted, which also raises questions about the nature and focus of the activities carried out by the Institute during that period.

14. Some of the stored biological materials had been transferred from the liquidated enterprise "Bioprom" and were used for the production of diagnostic and/or immunological preparations. The transfer was made in accordance with joint order of the Institute and the enterprise "Bioprom Odessa Plant" No. 24/37 "On the organization of work on the deposition of strains that are maintained in working condition at the enterprise" of 7 June 2002 providing that a commission was to be formed in order to determine, by 14 June 2002, the scope of work in verifying the actual qualitative properties of the strain material against the materials handed over and the feasibility of their further storage and use. However, the report noted that this work had not been carried out.

15. Thus, the absence of the need for such accumulation which could be justified by prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes allows one to assert that Ukraine has violated its obligations under Article I (1) of the BTWC.

16. In addition to the unwarranted amounts, the very assortment of pathogens studied and accumulated does not correspond with the main public health challenges and threats in Ukraine, where an increased number of cases of rubella, diphtheria and tuberculosis have been recorded.

17. Moreover, the list of pathogens under the study includes pathogens of dangerous infectious diseases that are potential agents of biological weapons.
18. As stated in the Report on the Implementation of the Biological Threat Reduction Program in Ukraine of 27 June 2019, 10 biological research projects and 9 biological surveillance projects had been implemented since the start of the contract in 2008.
19. We would like to underscore that the stated objective of the program is to enable effective detection and diagnosis of infectious diseases in Ukraine.
20. It is specified that only those infections considered a priority by the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) would be studied as part of the collaborative effort.
21. Such language implies a situation where the objects of research are pathogens that are of interest to the Pentagon's DTRA, but, in fact, are not current threats to Ukrainian health care. Yet the real threats to public health remain unaddressed.
22. Priority projects are aimed at studying the potential biological weapons agents: the Crimean Congo fever, Hantaviruses, anthrax, and tularemia.
23. An example is the situation with measles and rubella that are not considered a priority by the DTRA, despite their extreme urgency in the context of the complex epidemiological situation in Ukraine.
24. The situation is opposite in the case of the pathogen of glanders: cases of this disease have never been reported on the territory of Ukraine. Despite this fact, a separate project on glanders was funded by the DTRA and completed as part of the Program.
25. The list of infections of animals studied within the Threat Reduction Program in Ukraine includes severe anthroponotic diseases, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza, as well as economically significant infections with a high pandemic potential that could cause damage to the agricultural sector, including African swine fever and classical swine fever, and Newcastle disease.
26. If we talk about African swine fever, the direct economic damage from this disease in the Russian Federation from 2008 to 2021 was more than 47 billion rubles. And more than 1.7 million pigs were destroyed from 2016 to 2021 alone.
27. As an example, we would also like to mention the TAP-6 project aimed at analyzing the spread of African and classical swine fever in wildlife populations on the territory of Ukraine. The stated goal of the project is to assess the epizootic status of the wild boar population in regions bordering the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus.
28. Such a focus of activities and the DTRA's interest in their results contradicts their prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes.
29. In the context of determining the nature of biological activities on Ukrainian territory, the very fact that the U.S. and Ukrainian military agencies participate in the Program implemented by the DTRA is indicative. According to the Report on the Implementation of the Biological Threat Reduction Program in Ukraine, the participants from the U.S. side are the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, the Naval Medical Research Center, and the Ministry of Defense from the Ukrainian side.
30. We would like to emphasize that we consider such non-transparent activities with the use of agents of particularly dangerous and economically significant infections, carried out by representatives of military agencies in the immediate vicinity of the state borders, as a direct threat to the national security of the Russian Federation.
31. The above circumstances, the scale and nature of military and biological activities carried out in Ukraine reveal violations of the provisions contained in the first part of Article I of the BWC.
32. In this regard we would like to ask the Ukrainian side to provide clarifications on the following issues:
 - what kind of activity involving pathogen materials was conducted in I.Mechnikov Anti-Plague Institute from 2017 to 2019 if according to the report

of the Ukrainian Ministry of Health' commission, there were more than two thousand storage units of pathogenic biomaterial while in 2018 only one official research work involving tularemia strains from the institute's collection was conducted and no official report on the use of the collection in 2017 was provided

- why as of December 28, 2018, the I. Mechnikov Anti-Plague Institute in Odessa lacked documented information regarding the actual status of strains, and the commission was not provided with evidence base regarding the need to contain a large number of pathogenic microorganism test tubes with the same strains of different passages;
- what is the reason for the choice of pathogens studied in Ukraine under the threat reduction program, and why in a number of cases the nomenclature of pathogens studied is not related to relevant public health issues and can hardly be explained by preventive or protective purposes (for example, the TAP-6 project to study the causative agent of glanders, cases of which have never been recorded by the veterinary and sanitary and epidemiological services of Ukraine).
