

**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**

**REPORT OF SEMINARS ORGANISED BY
THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**

Prepared by the United Kingdom

Introduction

1. In October 2002 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) held a seminar as part of the consultation process arising from publication of the UK Green Paper¹. Participants agreed that it would be useful to hold a further series of seminars involving a broad range of organisations and disciplines to assist any follow-up work arising from the Fifth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). The first of these was held in July 2003² and considered wider issues of relevance to strengthening the BTWC; observations from this seminar were reported in BWC/MSP.2003/MX/WP.34.

2. The July 2003 seminar involved some preliminary discussion on codes of conduct for scientists, noting that this topic would be considered in greater detail at a dedicated seminar later in 2003. In fact, two seminars were arranged by the FCO to assist the United Kingdom in preparing for the 2005 BTWC meetings to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on the content, promulgation and adoption of codes of conduct for scientists. This paper reports the participation in and key observations³ from both seminars.

Seminar details

¹ “Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: Countering the Threat from Biological Weapons” (CM5484)

² “Managing the Threat from Biological Weapons: Science, Society and Secrecy”

³ The observations were ideas expressed by participants in the seminars, rather than agreed UK views.

3. The first seminar was hosted by the FCO on 15 December 2003 to seek initial views of the academic, scientific and industrial communities on codes of conduct in relation to BTWC issues. Participants came from government departments (FCO, Ministry of Defence, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Department of Trade and Industry, Office of Science and Technology and the Health Protection Agency); research councils and trusts (the Medical Research Council, the Wellcome Trust and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council); trade and professional bodies (the Bioindustry Association, the Royal Society, the British Medical Association and the Institute of Biology); and universities (Bradford, Exeter, Sussex). The seminar addressed a number of themes including the utility, scope, promulgation and adoption of codes of conduct and formed a basis for continuing consultations with interested parties.

4. The second seminar was hosted jointly by the FCO and the Department of Science & Technology Studies, University College London on 17 June 2004. Participation was similar to that for the first seminar, with additional representation from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Science and Development Network, University College London and Napier and Leeds Universities. In preparation for this seminar, the FCO circulated to participants a short discussion paper outlining the key themes that emerged during discussions at the December 2003 seminar. These themes, which covered such aspects as awareness raising and education, individual and organisational responsibilities, and best practice guidelines, formed the basis for further discussions at the second seminar.

Key Observations

5. Discussions at the seminars, involving participation across the wide range of organisations represented, raised the following observations of relevance to the work on codes of conduct at the 2005 BTWC Meetings.

General

6. Initial views included the need to address a perception among some scientists that the introduction of codes of conduct would impose additional controls and regulation on science.

7. Similarly, it was perceived that some scientists were unaware of the problem of the potential for misuse of science and its relevance to their work.

8. There was wide recognition of the need to consult and involve the wide scientific community in discussion of codes of conduct.

9. It was recognised that work on codes of conduct should build on existing frameworks, procedures and practices.

Purpose and scope

10. It was considered important to address the purpose of codes of conduct and demonstrate that the costs of development, promulgation and adoption did not outweigh the benefits.

11. Codes of conduct might have a part to play in promoting the proper use of science, in managing the risk of misuse and in reinforcing the international norm against biological weapons.
12. Although work on codes of conduct might begin in individual countries, it would be most beneficial for codes to be eventually international in scope, thus encouraging best practice worldwide.
13. Codes of conduct could have a valuable role in raising awareness and educating scientists about their individual responsibilities under the BTWC and related legislation; it was recognised that a culture change among scientists might be required.

Responsibilities

14. Codes of conduct were considered to have a role in supporting responsible behaviour by scientists. It was recognised that responsibilities might be at both individual and organisational levels.
15. Responsibilities of individuals might include ensuring that their work is compatible with the provisions of the BTWC, considering the potential for misuse of their work by others and what steps could be taken to prevent this, and to raise concerns about actions of others that might potentially be in breach of the BTWC prohibitions.
16. Institutions and organisations could be encouraged to reflect BTWC issues and the principles of relevant codes of conduct in their operational frameworks and procedures. Research Councils and other funding bodies could have a role in ensuring that research proposals consider implications for the BTWC and the risk/benefit balance of the work. Review panels, referees and publishers could also consider these issues.

Guidance

17. The value of providing guidance to individuals and organisations considering the implications of the BTWC for work in relevant fields was recognised. Such guidance might cover, for example:
 - i Good practice for those responsible for considering the ethics and safety aspects of proposed research and other projects;
 - ii Advice for review panels and referees for funding bodies and publishers;
 - iii How to deal with research that produces unpredictable results that might be of relevance to the prohibitions of the BTWC;
 - iv Principles for clear and safeguarded processes for individuals to raise concerns about potential breaches of the BTWC.

Awareness-raising and education

18. Awareness-raising and education could play a significant role in creating a culture change among scientists and in reinforcing responsibilities under the BTWC.

19. In undertaking such activities, it would be important to target the appropriate communities; implications of the BTWC provisions might be farther reaching than just the life sciences, involving scientists, specialists and administrators from a wide range of disciplines. It would also be important that such activities were carried out as a continuing process.

20. It was noted that insufficient attention was currently given to covering BTWC issues in science and ethics further education courses. Further consideration would be needed to determine how best to introduce BTWC issues and responsibilities into education.

Comments

21. One key result of the seminars was a realisation of the need to raise awareness of the BTWC and relevant legislation so that practising scientists were aware of the prohibitions and could consider any implications for themselves or their work.

22. The wide-ranging discussions at the seminars provided constructive input to the UK's preparation for the 2005 BTWC meetings and a good basis for further consultations with participating organisations and other interested parties, such as the Home Office, the Health & Safety Executive and DEFRA⁴. In addition, this work stimulated and assisted government departments and other organisations and bodies in progressing their own initiatives on codes of conduct and the responsibilities of scientists.

⁴ Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs