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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Consideration of ways and means to enhance national implementation, including enforcement of national legislation, strengthening of national institutions and coordination among national law enforcement institutions

INCREASING THE TECHNICAL EXPERTISE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO ASSIST COUNTER-PROLIFERATION INITIATIVES

Submitted by Australia

Introduction

1. The implementation in Australia of counter-proliferation initiatives and the different control regimes that may be attached to them, such as export controls, are mainly the responsibility of agencies such as the Department of Defence, the Australian Customs Services and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Usually, law enforcement agencies are not directly involved unless an infraction has been identified, which will trigger an investigation and result, hopefully, in the prosecution of the offender.

2. One difficulty, however, is that such investigations may require high-level technical expertise that usually is unavailable in traditional police forces. The Australian Government has addressed this issue by bringing science closer to the law enforcement agencies.

Bringing science to the law enforcement agencies

3. In the last two years, the Australian Government has invested in several projects designed to improve the level of technical expertise available to law enforcement agencies:

(i) The establishment of a mobile laboratory that is staffed by a microbiologist and a chemist. This laboratory can be deployed in case of a CBR event to support the

emergency response, but it can also be used to facilitate highly technical forensic investigations by bringing the scientists and their equipment close to the crime scene or to the facility under suspicion.

(ii) The creation of a centre of excellence in CBR matters — the Australian Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Data Centre (the CBRN Data Centre).

The CBRN Data Centre

4. The establishment of the CBRN Data Centre was the result of a government decision taken in 2005, but the centre was only officially opened on the 2nd of July 2007. It is hosted by the Australian Federal Police and is located within its forensic services division. However, it is a national centre that provides assistance to all agencies needing technical support with any chemical, biological or radiological matters. The centre is still in its infancy and it currently employs only 9 staff, all of them having academic qualifications in chemistry, biology or radiation physics.

5. The centre has a mandate to provide real-time technical information on CBR-related topics. The centre collects and assesses available data about CBR agents, their precursors and the methodologies required to prepare them. It also assesses the availability of the agents in Australia, how they could be used for illegal purposes and advises on their potential dual-use. Concerning the centre's biological capacity, this includes gathering data about the location of pathogens and the security of facilities holding them, not only to prevent their use by terrorist groups but also to reduce their accessibility to individuals that may be interested in using legitimate cultures to prepare biological weapons.

6. The centre was primarily created to support counter-terrorism and provide assessments on the feasibility and impacts of potential terrorist use of CBR agents in Australia. However, its high-level technical capacity has direct applications to Australia's efforts to counter the proliferation of biological weapons.

7. The centre supports all agencies having to deal with CBR events and technologies. Its advisory role includes:

(i) Supporting the Government CBR committees.

(ii) Assisting police forces investigating the misuse of CBR agents and technologies.

(iii) Assisting other agencies in identifying materials and technologies that could be used unlawfully.

(iv) Helping the preparedness and capability development of emergency services and other front-line providers such as analytical laboratories.

(v) Providing first responders with technical advice in case of a CBR event.

(vi) Supporting research projects that address identified CBR-related technical gaps, such as fast identification of biological agents and new forensic techniques that allow the handling of evidence contaminated with CBR agents. The centre has a close relationship with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation, promoting important collaboration between police forensics and defence science.

8. In support of the Australian Government initiatives to increase the security of high-risk CBR materials, the CBRN Data Centre is providing advice about the materials that may require increased security measures and controls. It is also working on lists of indicators and suspicious behaviours that could be used to identify an illegal interest in CBR agents. These lists will inform Government-sponsored awareness-raising activities in relevant industries, the retail sector and academia, and assist people working in biological facilities to detect unlawful activities.

9. The CBRN Data Centre also has an important liaison function with international partner agencies and facilitates the collaboration and exchange of technical information.

Summary

10. The CBRN Data Centre does not implement or enforce counter-proliferation initiatives and measures itself, but rather, provides a central point of contact in Australia for CBR technical information that supports all agencies that need to carry out identification of CBR-related materials or technologies, to investigate potential misuse of these CBR materials or to respond to a CBR event.

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