

**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
Consideration of regional and
sub-regional cooperation on
implementation of the Convention**

**REGIONAL BWC COOPERATION AND
INTERNATIONAL BIOTERRORISM**

Submitted by Australia

1. The acquisition, development or use by terrorists of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials would conjoin two key international security threats: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction – however rudimentary – and international terrorism. Bioterrorism is a particular concern and warrants a broad-based and coordinated response.
2. Terrorists in Australia's region have demonstrated interest in acquiring or developing biological materials. Malaysian-born biochemist Yazid Sufaat is believed to have been one of Al Qaeda's main anthrax researchers, and a chemical and biological weapons manual was discovered in a Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) safe-house in the Philippines in 2003.
3. Australia considers that national implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) helps raise barriers to bioterrorism. While the BWC alone cannot adequately address the threat, effective national implementation of key articles has an important role. Article IV, for example, covers enactment of penal legislation, ensuring the safety and security of biological materials, strengthening disease surveillance capacities, and promoting training and awareness-raising¹.

International counter-bioterrorism strategy

4. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has developed an international counter-bioterrorism strategy which recognises the unique challenges posed by bioterrorism.

¹ Final Document of the Sixth BWC Review Conference; BWC/CONF.VI/6.

The Strategy aims to protect the interests of Australia and others, in particular by assisting partner countries in the region to understand the threat, enhance the security of their high-risk biological materials, and develop and implement enforcement legislation.

5. The Strategy promotes cooperation and coordination, both in Australia and in partner countries, between traditional security (policy and operational) agencies and new players such as health and agriculture agencies which, traditionally, have had little counter-proliferation or counter-terrorism involvement. These agencies have technical and administrative expertise and practices to mitigate the effects of natural diseases which can be adapted to protecting against deliberately propagated disease.

Biosafety and biosecurity training

6. In May 2007, Australia organised a biosafety and biosecurity training workshop in Australia for 12 technical experts from South East Asia as a component of its Strategy. The workshop raised awareness of the threat of bioterrorism, underlined that laboratory biosecurity builds on biosafety and raises barriers to bioterrorism, and established an informal network of contacts for information-sharing. The Asia Pacific Centre for Military Law at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Government's Defence Science and Technology Organisation provided an overview of international instruments and issues relating to the life sciences including the BWC, and the Australian Animal Health Laboratory, Geelong, provided technical training. Participants said that the workshop was timely because of current South East Asian growth in biotechnological research and diagnostic facilities; it addressed issues of concern to existing facilities and informed on the planning of new facilities.

Article X

7. Technical assistance and cooperation in biotechnology advances BWC objectives and helps address contemporary biological threats. Australia is strongly committed to international economic and social development and to sharing the benefits of scientific and technological progress. Australia aims to remain a key player in the development of biotechnology for peaceful purposes and has a consistent record of providing technical assistance, facilitating the exchange of information and cooperating in a wide range of biotechnology-related activities. Through such arrangements², and related components of its Strategy, Australia fulfils its obligations under Article X while raising barriers to international bioterrorism.

Further cooperation

8. Australia would welcome further cooperation, particularly in respect of its region, to share information to counter the threat of bioterrorism and build capacity to:

- (i) assess the risks posed by individual biological agents;
- (ii) develop and enhance laboratory biosafety and biosecurity programs;
- (iii) develop and implement supporting legislation;
- (iv) detect, diagnose, contain and effectively report disease epidemics; and
- (v) ensure effective inter-agency and international communication and cooperation.

² See BWC/CONF.VI/WP.33.