

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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Measures related to Article IV of the Convention

Strengthening National Implementation: The National Biorisk Management Committee in Iraq (Overview)

Submitted by the Republic of Iraq

1. This working paper provides an overview of the establishment of the National Biorisk Management Committee (NBMC) in Iraq, the role it can play in relation to the implementation of the BTWC, and how it can enhance biosafety and biosecurity measures (biorisk management) by implementing its objectives and tasks at the national level.

I. Introduction

2. Biorisk management is an essential and important issue in the laboratory quality management system. Given the importance of measures that can be applied to enhance biosafety and biosecurity to reduce threats in Iraq, the National Monitoring Authority for Nonproliferation proposed to the Ministry of Health to establish a national committee to manage the issue of biorisks in national facilities and institutions. In 2012, the National Committee for Biorisk Management was formed based on the approval of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, headed by the Minister of Health, and the included representatives of the relevant ministries and institutions (including but not limited to Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Iraqi National Monitoring Authority).

3. The Committee focused on the importance of complementary work between national authorities and coordination among them in all stages of dealing with biorisks. The Committee was able to bring stakeholders together and raised the issue of biosecurity and biosafety measures and procedures in their institutions specifically, the establishment of a biorisk management system, which represents a new topic at the national and international levels.

4. One of its most important achievements was the preparation of the Biorisk Management Act, in addition to the National Pathogen List.



II. The role of Biorisk management measures in the implementation of the BTWC

5. The BTWC obligates all state parties in Article 4 to take all appropriate national legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prohibit and prevent the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, or retention of the agents, toxins, weapons, equipment and means of delivery specified in article I of the Convention, within the territory of such State, under its jurisdiction or under its control anywhere. Compliance with this Article necessitates establishing a biorisk management system and strengthening national methods and capabilities to implement biosafety and biosecurity measures at the national level to ensure the safety and security of pathogens or toxins in laboratories and facilities and during transportation; prevent accidental release or unintended exposure to them; prevent loss, theft, unauthorized possession or transfer, and misuse; and prevent such agents or toxins from reaching unauthorized persons or non-state actors and use it for purposes prohibited by the BTWC or for terrorist purposes.

III. The National Biorisk Management Committee aims to achieve the following:

- Strengthen national capacities in the field of biological security and safety in related institutions and facilities, including the private sector, to confront potential threats and control risks resulting from dealing with pathogens and toxins or reducing to acceptable levels through the development of an effective biorisk management system to ensure the preservation of the environment and society and to ensure the implementation of the relevant ministries and institutions of their obligations in accordance with the BTWC and Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) regarding the implementation of biosafety and biosecurity measures in Iraq.
- Promote effective biorisk management systems in biological laboratories in relevant institutions and facilities, including the private sector, in accordance with national and international standards to control the possession, handling, development, use, production, storage, transfer and disposal of pathogens and toxins to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing and using them for prohibited purposes.
- Develop policies and strategies to reduce biorisk and direct relevant ministries and institutions to adopt and implement national laws, regulations, instructions and standards and those issued by relevant international organizations and international conventions related to disposal operations Hazardous waste, transportation, environmental preservation and non-proliferation.

IV. Tasks of the National Biorisk Management Committee

6. The National Biological Risk Management Committee undertakes the following tasks:

- Identifying gaps in biosafety and biosecurity practices and procedures in relevant laboratories and facilities.
- Developing national biorisk management policies and strategies.
- Developing instructions and propose legislation to manage biorisk to reduce the risk arising from them.
- Developing and annually updating the dual-use national list of human, animal and plant pathogens and toxins.
- Preparing, reviewing and monitoring the implementation of legislation, policies, strategies, action plans and controls related to biorisk management in laboratories and related facilities.

- Providing technical advice, guidance and direction to ministries and other stakeholders, including the private sector, with regard to biorisk management procedures.
- Providing guidance and counselling and raising awareness of biorisk in all ministries, institutions, and relevant authorities, including the private sector.
- Promoting cooperation with similar international and Arab national committees, and organizing joint programmes.

V. Subcommittees

7. In 2013, the National Committee formed three specialized subcommittees from among its members in order to assist in carrying out the tasks entrusted to it as follows:

- **The Pathogens Subcommittee** is tasked with preparing and updating the national list of pathogens and biological toxins and setting national criteria for selecting those pathogens.
- **The Legislation Subcommittee** is tasked with preparing drafts of policies, strategies, action plans, work mechanisms and biorisk management law in Iraq and issuing guidelines.
- **The Raising awareness Subcommittee** is tasked with preparing an action plan to develop mechanisms to raise awareness among workers in relevant ministries and institutions, and holding awareness conferences and workshops.

VI. National Partnerships

8. The NBMC has worked to reduce biothreats Iraq by promoting biosafety and biosecurity across ministries and relevant institutions, including the private sector. The committee has developed partnerships, maintained communication, and helped define roles and responsibilities of all institutions to enable the integration of biosafety and biosecurity among multiple ministries and organizations. The committee has also established close partnership and cooperation relations with the ministries of health, agriculture and higher education in the Kurdistan region, which recently resulted in the formation of the Kurdistan region's biorisk management committee based on what was recommended by the NBMC in 2015.

VII. International Partnerships

9. Since the formation of the National Biorisk Management Committee in Iraq in 2012, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) / Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP)/ Ministry of Defense in addition to the Sandia Laboratories, has been a strategic and essential partner. Extensive and broad support has been provided to the Committee including but not limited to: provision of workshops and training courses on biosafety and biosecurity procedures, training on the basics of biorisk management in accordance with international standards, support of networking across sectors and awareness raising activities. This support helped develop and enhance the capabilities of the committee to carry out its work and transfer best practices in the areas of assessment and management of biorisk to the relevant national institutions. This cooperation and support has also enhanced the capacity of the Committee to carry out its tasks and thus has strengthened the national implementation of the Convention in the field of biorisk management and ensuring the safety of workers and the security of pathogens and toxins in laboratories and facilities to prevent losing, stealing, or using them for prohibited purposes in contravention of the provisions of the Convention and Resolution 1540 (2004).

VIII. The Committee achievements

10. The National Biorisk Management Committee is the First Committee in Iraq that deals with biorisk management issue in accordance with international standards. The NBMC has played a key role in development of a National Biorisk Management System in Iraq to enhance national capabilities and reduce threats that result from dealing with pathogens and accidents resulting from them, whether accidental or intentional.

11. In November 2013, the National Biorisk Management Committee noted the lack of laws, guidance, rules, regulations and documents related to policies and strategies in biosecurity and biosafety in the Ministries and institutions, as well as the absence of a national list of pathogens and biological toxins of safety and security concern. In response, NBMC developed action plans, including goals, roles and responsibilities, and timeframes, to address these national level gaps in biorisk management and biothreat reduction. Specifically, the National Biorisk Management Committee prioritized drafting of such documents as a foundational step towards the establishment of Biorisk Management systems in Iraq. The Committee has so far accomplished the following:

- National biorisk management policy statement in Iraq.
- Biorisk management policy document in Iraq.
- Biorisk management national strategy document in Iraq.
- The national list of pathogens and biological toxins in Iraq – tiered according to risk groups.
- National list of pathogens and toxins of concern for import/export purposes.
- Biorisk management law in Iraq.
- Biorisk management guide in laboratories.
- Guidelines for handling and transferring pathogens and biological toxins.
- Holding the first Iraq conference to raise awareness of biorisk management in 2019.

12. The National Committee has worked with all relevant Iraqi national ministries and institutions on the adoption and implementation of programs and projects that will enhance national capacities to meet the biological risk threats, especially those related to emerging diseases and has clearly emerged through coordination and joint action to address the risk of Corona pandemic (COVID-19).

IX. Challenges facing the National Committee work

13. The main challenges facing the committee have been identified since the beginning at the national level, which include limited funding, insufficient means for risk assessment and measures, lack of a comprehensive and sustainable security culture, unsustainability of programs and procedures, overlapping roles and responsibilities due to weak responsibility culture, various measures taken by institutions and poor coordination between the relevant authorities. Funding, assessment measures, program sustainability, and a sustainable security culture lead to the establishment of short-term goals for biosafety and biosecurity activities. The communication and coordination between the relevant authorities and the overlapping of roles, responsibilities and procedures taken by the various institutions constitute another challenge that affects the implementation of the procedures in the long term.

X. The future of the National Biorisk Management Committee

14. The National Biorisk Management Committee will continue to work on overcoming the challenges and obstacles facing the establishment and maintenance of a biorisk management system in all relevant national institutions by strengthening their national partnerships and continuing to implement its goals and tasks. On the international level, the Committee is determined to develop greater international cooperation and partnerships that

contribute effectively to developing and strengthening national capabilities in the field of biorisk management to control or reduce the biothreats in Iraq.
