

# 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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## Fourth International Conference "Global Biosecurity Challenges. Problems and Solutions" (Sochi, 22–23 June 2023)

### Submitted by Russian Federation

1. The Fourth International Conference "Global Biosecurity Challenges. Problems and Solutions" (hereinafter – the "Conference") jointly organized by the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Welfare (Rospotrebnadzor) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation was held on 22–23 June 2023 in Sochi (Russia). Attended by over 400 delegates from 32 states of Central and South East Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe as well as 7 international organisations, it became the most representative Conference in its history starting from 2017.
2. The participants discussed modern threats to biological security related to the spread of infectious diseases, risks of misuse of scientific and technological advances in biological field, various capabilities of states to prevent, detect and respond to biological incidents as well as ways to strengthen the regime of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BTWC).
3. The delegates noted that at present biological security had an inter-disciplinary nature and depended on developments in healthcare, sanitary and epidemiological well-being, veterinary medicine and phytosanitary, biotechnology and international law as well as digitalization and implementing artificial intelligence.
4. Particular attention was paid to the newly revealed data on military biological research by the United States and its allies in the post-Soviet countries, especially in Ukraine, which provided an insight into the genuine goals of such activity.
5. The key importance of the BTWC as a fundamental tool of international law that not only placed a ban on the whole category of weapons of mass destruction but also created opportunities for developing international cooperation for peaceful purposes was confirmed. At the same time, it was emphasized that the potential for cooperation offered by the Convention was far from being used in full. Therefore, it is extremely important to contribute to its strengthening.
6. At the centre of discussions were the tasks of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention established by the Ninth Review Conference of the BTWC. The participants stressed the importance of developing an equal discussion aimed at supporting and promoting initiatives designed to strengthen the Convention, including increasing its potential to respond to current biological security challenges, ensure compliance with and verification of the implementation of obligations under the BTWC, analyze scientific and technical achievements related to the Convention and provide information on military biological activities outside the national territory.



7. The need for developing a legally binding Protocol to the BTWC with an effective verification mechanism in order to effectively address biological threats was emphasized. International tools to detect, alert and respond quickly to outbreaks of dangerous infectious diseases with pandemic potential are also in demand. The need to update the principles and procedures of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons was stressed.

8. The participants assessed the scientific and technological achievements in the field of prevention and elimination of biological threats. Separately, they discussed the issues of national and global level regulation to avoid the misuse of scientific advances in the area of biotechnology, synthetic biology and artificial intelligence.

9. The delegates discovered the best Russian practices and developments in the area of biological security as well as recent advances in the sphere of prevention and diagnostics of infections, including COVID-19, with the latest Russian mobile medical and biological rapid response units of Rospotrebnadzor and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. An exhibition of Russian laboratory equipment, testing, operating supplies and mobile laboratories was held.

10. Six parallel sections were organised within the framework of the Conference:

- Section № 1 "Risks of biotechnologies and prospects for regulation at the national and international level", chaired by Husham Ahmed, Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. New developments in biotechnologies requiring attention and assessment in the context of the BTWC were discussed, as well as key approaches and practices in biotechnology regulation to ensure biosafety at the national level;
- Section № 2 "Respect for sovereignty and ensuring collective biological security", chaired by Vladimir Kutyrev, Director of the Russian Research Anti-Plague Institute "Microb" of Rospotrebnadzor. The section addressed various aspects (including the problematic ones) of international cooperation aimed at overcoming transboundary biological risks, including the "substitution" of equal cooperation, which could contribute to building capacity in order to respond to the relevant challenges facing one of the parties, only by the tasks of extraterritorial monitoring of threats in the interests of the other party;
- Section № 3 "Evolution of international law in pandemic prevention", chaired by Vyacheslav Smolensky, Deputy Head of Rospotrebnadzor. There was an exchange of views on the need for changes in international regulation to improve preparedness for future epidemics, including the decision to amend the 2005 International Health Regulations and the development of a new international instrument to counter pandemics;
- Section № 4 "International Cooperation under Article X of the BTWC: Expectations and Reality", chaired by Alexey Alekhin, Advisor to the Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation. Participants from different countries noted the need to take measures to ensure universal and non-discriminatory implementation of Article X to develop the capacity of all States Parties to the BTWC, emphasized the insufficiency of the existing mechanisms and tools under the Convention, in particular to assess the implementation and potential violation of Article X of the BTWC;
- Section № 5 "Strengthening the BTWC regime: practical steps for the intersessional period 2023-2026", chaired by Konstantin Vorontsov, Deputy Director of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. The importance of active interaction between the experts of the BTWC States Parties within the framework of the intersessional work programme for the period 2023-2026 was noted in order to agree on common approaches to strengthening the Convention and to prepare specific proposals for adoption by the BTWC Tenth Review Conference;
- Section № 6 "Biological security and information technology", chaired by Vadim Govorun, Director of the Research Institute of Systems Biology and Medicine of

Rospotrebnadzor. The participants discussed biosecurity risks related to the use of modern digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, which are widely used in epidemiology, microbiology, bioinformatics, and the development of infection prevention and treatment tools.

11. The Conference adopted the Co-Chairs' Statement (attached).
12. The Sochi Conference, regularly organised by the Russian Federation, is designed to contribute into improving the implementation and strengthening of the BTWC and to facilitate the elaboration of consolidated positions of the States Parties. Due to the substantive content of the event and equal opportunities offered to all the participants to present their views on current challenges, the Sochi forum has acquired the status of one of the key international events on biosecurity issues.
13. The Fifth Biological Security Conference is scheduled for 2025.

## Annex

### **Fourth International Conference "Global threats to biological security. Problems and solutions" Sochi, Russian Federation. June 22-23, 2023. Statement by the Co-Chairs**

The Fourth International Conference "Global Threats to Biological Security. Problems and solutions" was held in Sochi on June 22–23, 2023.

The Conference, traditionally organized in the Russian Federation since 2017, has become the most representative event bringing together more than 400 delegates from 32 countries of Central and Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and 7 international organizations in a hybrid format.

Participants discussed current threats to biological security related to the propagation of infectious diseases, risks of misuse of scientific and technological advances in the biological field, uneven capabilities of states to prevent, detect and respond to biological incidents, as well as ways to strengthen the regime of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

It was noted that at present biological security had an inter-disciplinary nature and it depended on developments in the field of healthcare, sanitary and epidemiological well-being, veterinary medicine and phytosanitary, international law, biotechnology, digitalization and implementing artificial intelligence.

Delegates discussed regional and global risks associated with violation of the obligations under the BTWC, including those related to military-biological activities of the United States and Ukraine in the Ukrainian territory. It was emphasized that in order to effectively address biological threats it is necessary to strengthen the Convention (primarily by developing a legally binding Protocol to the BTWC with an effective verification mechanism), as well as international tools for rapid detection, notification and response to outbreaks of dangerous infectious diseases with pandemic potential. The need to update the principles and procedures of the UN Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons was stressed.

Participants took stock of scientific and technological achievements for preventing and eliminating biological threats. Particular attention was paid to regulatory issues at the national and global levels in order to prevent illegal use of scientific achievements in the field of biotechnology, synthetic biology and artificial intelligence.

Delegates noted that the BTWC plays a key role, being the first universal treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. The Convention creates a legal framework for promoting international cooperation in disease prevention and other peaceful purposes. It was emphasized that the cooperation potential provided for by the Convention to achieve its lofty goals is far from being fully used, therefore it is extremely important to contribute to its strengthening.

In this regard, special attention was paid to discussing the tasks of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the BTWC, established by the BTWC Ninth Review Conference. The participants stressed the importance of an equitable discussion aimed at supporting and promoting initiatives with a view to strengthen the Convention, its capacity to respond to current biological security challenges, ensure compliance with obligations under the BTWC and verification thereof, analyze scientific and Convention-related technological achievements, provide information about military biological activities abroad. Multilaterally agreed decisions taken by participating States can provide the necessary guarantees for the implementation of the Convention.

The Conference displayed Russian capabilities in the development and production of modern laboratory equipment, tests and vaccines, including Russian mobile medical and biological rapid response units of Rospotrebnadzor and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, used to combat biological threats in the Russian Federation and abroad.

The participants expressed interest in developing mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of biosecurity.

The Sochi event was held in an atmosphere of openness, equality and mutual respect, providing all Conference participants with equal opportunities to speak out on the most pressing agenda issues in the field of biological security and BTWC compliance.

At the suggestion of the host party the Fifth International Conference "Global Threats to Biological Security. Problems and Solutions" will be organized in the Russian Federation in 2025.

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