

# **Ninth Review Conference 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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**Follow-up to the recommendations and decisions of the Eighth Review Conference and the question of future review of the Convention**

## **The BWC One Health Surveillance Network - Building an international network of institutions for the surveillance, prevention, preparedness, response and assistance in case of biological incidents against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity**

**Submitted by Argentina and Brazil**

### *Summary*

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated our shared vulnerability to emergent biological agents in all fields, including human, animal and plant health. The BWC States Parties have progressively recognized the importance of concretely addressing the threat of hostile use of biological agents and toxins against agriculture, livestock and the natural environment. Aiming at improving the cooperation on this important subject, Argentina and Brazil propose to establish a network that would encompass some of the main governmental institutions of the BWC States Parties that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats, the so-called “BWC One Health Surveillance Network”.

## **I. Background information**

1. Since the Third Review Conference, the BWC States Parties have recognized that “experimentation against man, animal or plants that has no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes is inconsistent with undertakings contained in Article I” (III.I.4). Furthermore, the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Review Conferences noted “that existing institutional ways and means of ensuring multilateral cooperation among all States Parties need to be developed further in order to promote international cooperation for peaceful uses in areas relevant to the Convention, including such areas as medicine, public health, agriculture and the environment” [VI.X.48, VII.X.57 and VIII.X.67].
2. During the last Intersessional Program (2018-2020), especially under the debates of the Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX 4), Argentina, Brazil and many other countries have emphasized the importance of concretely addressing the threat of hostile use of biological agents and toxins against agriculture, livestock and the natural environment.
3. This discussion is of utmost importance to the BWC States Parties since natural, accidental or intentional biological incidents against agriculture and livestock can affect the domestic production and the international flow of agricultural commodities and food derived



from animal protein, with direct impacts on ensuring global food security. Furthermore, these incidents threaten biological diversity of various ecosystems, mitigating the possible uses of natural genetic heritage by future generations.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated our shared vulnerability to emergent biological agents. This susceptibility is crosscutting to all fields, since human health and animal health are interdependent and bound to the health of the ecosystems in which they exist, as summarized by the concept of “one health” stated by the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH).<sup>1</sup>

5. This shared vulnerability in a context of increasing health risks makes the subject of creating new and more efficient alternatives to deal with the challenge of protecting crops, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats of utmost important for all States Parties. This discussion has progressively gained momentum in the BWC meetings, as demonstrated by some consistent working papers presented on this matter.

6. Aiming at improving, under the BWC legal framework, the cooperation and assistance among States Parties on this important subject, Argentina and Brazil propose the establishment of a network that would encompass some of the main governmental institutions of the BWC States Parties that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and the biodiversity against biological threats, hereinafter called “the BWC One Health Surveillance Network”.

## II. Objective

7. The BWC One Health Surveillance Network aims to be a mechanism for direct dialogue, mutual support, joint-projects and exchange of best practices among animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions of the BWC States Parties that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats.

## III. Structure and governance

8. The BWC One Health Surveillance Network aims to be an action-oriented multi-stakeholder network of cooperation that will not require any specific procedure to govern its day-to-day activities. Therefore, no permanent administrative structure or regular financial contributions from the States Parties of the BWC are expected in such flexible and dynamic network.

9. The BWC One Health Surveillance Network will be guided by a Steering Committee, integrated by rotating positions among the participant governmental institutions nominated by States Parties. The number of members, mandate, system of rotation and other procedural details concerning the functioning of the Steering Committee is to be decided by the participant institutions, in their first meeting. The Steering Committee will report on and receive guidance from the annual Meeting of States Parties of the BWC and from the BWC Review Conferences.

10. The mandate of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network will be reviewed by each BWC Review Conference, whereas updates regarding its work will be addressed as an agenda point in the Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX4) as well as by the relevant meetings of States Parties.

11. All animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions of the BWC States Parties could become partners of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network, at any moment. Each State Party of the BWC has the prerogative to decide which of its national institutions will join the network.

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<sup>1</sup> World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), “One Health Initiative”, available at: <https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/global-initiatives/one-health/>.

12. Partner institutions will get access to all online channels of communications, training opportunities and programs focused on the transnational exchange of information, knowledge and best practices. The eventual costs associated to the organization of events, development of new information technology tools or other initiatives launched under the BWC One Health Surveillance Network will be at the expense of the proposing State(s) Party(ies) and its nominated institutions.

#### **IV. Guidelines**

13. The BWC One Health Surveillance Network would focus on the following deliverables:

(a) Fostering dialogue: to build permanent and direct channels of communications (pool of focal points, online lists of communication and other information technology tools) between animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories and other related institutions of the BWC States Parties;

(b) Capacity-building: to organize seminars and joint-training courses on surveillance, prevention, preparedness and response to biological incidents against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity. Modules of exchange of information, knowledge and best practices on crisis management are expected to take place in different States Parties of the BWC, targeting both a regional and a global audience;

(c) Operational channel of communication in emergencies: in case of alleged incidents involving threats against agriculture, livestock and the natural environment, the partner institutions of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network are expected to play a major role on gathering information from other national institutions and to perform as an operational channel of communication with international counterparts of the Network, helping to coordinate international efforts of response to emergencies. The Network is also expected to improve communication between States Parties and international organizations, such as the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL);

(d) Channelling requests for assistance: to help coordinating the deployment of teams of experts and the supply of logistical and laboratory support required by other States Parties when responding to potential biological incidents against agriculture, livestock and the natural environment.

#### **V. Implementation**

14. In order to create the BWC One Health Surveillance Network, we propose that each State Party could voluntarily nominate governmental institutions that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats. To favor an efficient operation of the network, we suggest each State Party to nominate up to three governmental institutions among animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories and others.

15. If the creation of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network is agreed by States Parties during the IX RevConf, Brazil intends to host the 1st BWC One Health Surveillance Network Seminar, in 2023, with the participation of representatives of animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions nominated by the BWC States Parties.

16. The 1st BWC One Health Surveillance Network Seminar would aim to consolidate the communication between partner institutions and to discuss the following themes, without exclusion of other issues to be suggested by States Parties during or after the IX RevCon:

(a) Governance of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network: guidelines of governance for the Steering Committee of the Network;

(b) Real threats against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity: espionage, biowarfare, intentional introduction of diseases, domestic or foreign terrorist activities by state or non-state actors;

(c) Potential consequences of agricultural incidents: economic shortages, imbalance of international trade exchanges, impacts on commodities prices, risk of food insecurity and spill-overs towards human health and national security;

(d) Best practices on surveillance, prevention, preparedness and response to natural, accidental or intentional biological threats against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity;

(e) Building national plans for emergency response through training and simulation exercises.

17. In order to help building a consensus on the creation of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network, we submit to the assessment of States Parties the following draft paragraphs to be included in the final report of the Ninth Review Conference of the BWC:

*In order to concretely address the threat of hostile use of biological agents and toxins against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity, the BWC States Parties decide on the creation of the BWC One Health Surveillance Network, with the mandate of fostering direct cooperation among governmental institutions for the surveillance, prevention, preparedness, response and assistance in this matter.*

*The BWC One Health Surveillance Network aims to be a mechanism encompassing animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions of BWC States Parties, for direct dialogue, joint-projects for capacity-building, exchange of best practices, and mutual support on assistance and response to emergencies involving biological incidents against agriculture, livestock and biodiversity.*

*The BWC One Health Surveillance Network will be guided by a Steering Committee, integrated by rotating positions among the governmental institutions nominated by States Parties. The network shall have no budgetary implications to the BWC States Parties. The eventual costs associated to its voluntary activities shall be at the expense of the proposing State(s) Party(ies) and its(their) nominated institutions.*

*The Steering Committee will report on and receive guidance from the annual Meeting of States Parties of the BWC, the BWC Review Conferences and other relevant meetings of States Parties.*

*States Parties are called to voluntary nominate, preferably before 30 April 2023, up to three national institutions to integrate the BWC One Health Surveillance Network, among their animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats.*