

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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English only

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Item 11 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of issues identified in the review of the operation of the Convention
as provided for in its Article XII and any possible consensus follow-up action**

Reinforcing Laboratory Biosafety and Biosecurity Internationally

**Submitted by Canada, Germany, Mexico, and the United States of
America**

I. Introduction

1. Every country should aim to better prepare for a pandemic or for other high consequence biological threats, whether naturally occurring, accidental, or deliberate. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of research and work with potentially high-consequence pathogens for global health security, including for purposes of diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines. Like past epidemics and pandemics, COVID-19 has already led to new efforts to reinforce these capacities in affected countries – which, in the case of a pandemic, means worldwide. This expansion of work with high-consequence pathogens has important benefits. It is also critical that this work is conducted safely and securely and that dangerous pathogens are handled, stored, and transported in a safe and secure manner.

2. The global expansion in life sciences and biotechnology research and development and the increase in the number of high-containment laboratories, are taking place in a context of uneven biosafety and biosecurity practices and oversight worldwide, due to differing levels of capacity, regulatory controls and enforcement, and investment. There is room for substantial improvement in global biosafety, biosecurity, and oversight for life sciences research whose results could be misused for biological weapons, to prevent accidental biological incidents and deliberate misuse – and a need for sustained international cooperation to develop resources and build needed capacity toward these ends.

3. This issue is not new; several working papers have discussed laboratory sustainability and capacity-building since at least 2012.¹ A recent working paper summarizing proposals to enhance the institutional machinery of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) in the context of cooperation and assistance under Article X includes, as one potential scalable initiative, “training and logistical resources for establishing, operating, and maintaining laboratories for high-consequence pathogens in resource-limited settings.”² This work is more relevant and urgent than ever.

¹ BWC/MSP/2012/MX/WP.2 - Challenges to developing international cooperation and assistance on biosafety and biosecurity: matching resources to reality - submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

² BWC/CONF.IX/PC/WP.9 - Outline of Proposals to Enhance the Institutional Machinery of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) in the Context of Cooperation and Assistance under Article X – submitted by Finland, Georgia, Norway, and the Philippines.



4. BWC States Parties should seek to reinforce existing efforts to promote and support laboratory biosafety and biosecurity, including by providing the needed financial and technical resources, through a collaborative, forward-looking effort to strengthen global biosafety and biosecurity.

5. Already a number of countries with active life sciences research programs have enacted national legislation and regulations with the goal of strengthening biosafety and biosecurity. Global action is also needed because the risks have global implications.

II. Proposed Approach

6. The Ninth BWC Review Conference is an excellent opportunity to highlight the need for strengthening laboratory biosafety and laboratory biosecurity globally and to take initial steps to achieve this vision. Language in the Final Document would send a powerful political message about the importance of this issue and generate support for practical measures.

7. Language along the following lines should be considered:

The BWC States Parties:

(a) recognize the important health security benefits of life sciences research and its critical role in combatting disease, and reaffirm that these activities should be devoted exclusively to peaceful biological activities in line with the BWC provisions;

(b) resolve to enhance collaboration in global biosafety, laboratory biosecurity and oversight for life sciences research whose results could be misused for biological weapons purposes, to prevent such misuse and preserve the prohibition of such weapons, given the recognized need for substantial improvement on these areas;

(c) welcome the beneficial national- and international-level biosafety and biosecurity measures already being taken by individual States Parties;

(d) resolve to continue strengthening national oversight and transparency of life sciences research, particularly research that might enhance transmissibility or virulence of high-consequence pathogens;

(e) commit to sharing and implementing best practices in life sciences research, including establishing robust oversight of research involving pathogenic or toxic genetic elements, and welcome international initiatives to provide relevant guidelines.

(f) commit to working cooperatively with private sector partners, relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and academia to achieve the objective of strengthened laboratory biosafety and laboratory biosecurity;

(g) commit to continue facilitating the availability of national and international technical resources and tools to provide support for both regulators and individual laboratories, and to take into consideration the need for capacity-building support and sustainable financing; and

(h) welcome existing capacity-building assistance efforts and urge States Parties in a position to do so to increase such efforts.
