

Information Note¹

- Event:** *Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of Experts*
- Organizers:** Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) States Parties and the Implementation Support Unit (ISU)
- Date and venue:** 12-16 August 2013, Geneva, Switzerland
- Participants:** Eighty-one States Parties to the Convention (out of the total number of 170 States Parties); three signatory States (Myanmar, Nepal, United Republic of Tanzania); two observer States- Israel and Namibia (neither parties or signatories); United Nations (1540 Committee Group of Experts, UNODA-Geneva, UNIDIR); observer organizations (EU, FAO, ICRC, INTERPOL, OPCW, WHO, and OIE); seven scientific, professional, commercial and academic organizations and experts as guests of the Meeting of Experts (IFBA, VERTIC, DCVMN, Nanabiosys, Sanofi, Dr. Cheng Zhu and Dr. Simon Wain-Hobson); and thirteen non-governmental organizations and research institutes. A list of all participants in the Meeting of Experts is contained in document BWC/MSP/2013/MX/INF.3 at: <http://www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting>

1. Objectives of the BWC Meeting of Experts

The 2013 BWC Meeting of Experts (MX) was the second in a series of four years of meetings in the third inter-sessional process of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). The third inter-sessional process was agreed at the Seventh BWC Review Conference that was held in December 2011. The inter-sessional meetings are intended to be practical and focused on promoting ideas and learning from experiences in order to develop common understandings and effective actions. This Meeting of Experts will be followed by a Meeting of States Parties on 9-13 December 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.

2. Background

The 2013 meetings are chaired by Ms. Judit Körömi, the Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Hungary, with two Vice-Chairs – Ambassador Mazlan Muhammad of Malaysia and Ambassador Urs Schmid of Switzerland.

In accordance with the decision of the Seventh Review Conference, the Meeting of Experts considered three standing agenda items (cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X; review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention; and strengthening national implementation), as well as the biennial item of how to enable fuller participation in the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs).

¹ For information –not an official report. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the 1540 Committee or of the organizers or participants in the event.

3. Highlights

Ms. Judit Körömi of Hungary, the Chair of the 2013 Meeting of Experts (MX), opened the meeting by welcoming '*experts who have travelled from many countries around the world*' and noting that the MX would continue with the '*tried and tested working practices*' of the prior meetings.

Opening statements were made by Iran (for the Non-Aligned Movement), Pakistan, Brazil, Russia, Malaysia, India, Mexico, Switzerland, Kenya, Algeria, Indonesia, Lithuania, Madagascar, China, Cuba, Philippines, Benin, Ecuador and Ghana; followed by the European Union. Non-governmental organizations addressed the meeting in an informal session with statements from the University of Bradford, International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Landau Network Centro Volta and the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; VERTIC; Pax Christi International; the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; and the University of London.

The States Parties conducted the meeting in accordance with the indicative schedule posted online on the BWC ISU website at: <http://www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting>.

Specifically, the discussed addressed the following topics and sub-topics:

How to enable fuller participation in the CBMs.

Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X):

- Reports by States Parties on their implementation of Article X, and reports by the ISU on the operation of the database system to facilitate assistance requests and offers;
- Challenges and obstacles to developing international cooperation, assistance and exchange in the biological sciences and technology, including equipment and material, for peaceful purposes to their full potential, and possible means of overcoming these;
- A range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of Article X taking into account all of its provisions, including facilitation of cooperation and assistance, including in terms of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for peaceful purposes, and identification of critical gaps and needs in these areas;
- Ways and means to target and mobilize resources, including financial resources, to address gaps and needs for assistance and cooperation, in particular from developed to developing States Parties, and from international and regional organizations and other relevant stakeholders;
- Education, training, exchange and twinning programs and other means of developing human resources in the biological sciences and technology relevant to the implementation of the Convention, particularly in developing countries;
- Capacity-building, through international cooperation, in biosafety and biosecurity, and for detecting, reporting, and responding to outbreaks of infectious disease or biological weapons attacks, including in the areas of preparedness, response, and crisis management and mitigation;
- Coordination of cooperation with other relevant international and regional organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.

Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention, focusing on advances in technologies for surveillance, detection, diagnosis and mitigation of infectious diseases, and similar occurrences caused by toxins in humans, animals and plants:

- New science and technology developments that have potential for uses contrary to the provisions of the Convention;
- New science and technology developments that have potential benefits for the Convention, including those of special relevance to disease surveillance, diagnosis and mitigation;

- Possible measures for strengthening national biological risk management, as appropriate, in research and development involving new science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention;
- Voluntary codes of conduct and other measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists, academia and industry;
- Education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology;
- Science- and technology-related developments relevant to the activities of multilateral organizations such as the WHO, OIE, FAO, IPPC and OPCW;
- Any other science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention.

Strengthening national implementation:

- A range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of the Convention; especially Articles III
- Ways and means to enhance national implementation, sharing best practices and experiences, including the voluntary exchange of information among States Parties on their national implementation, enforcement of national legislation, strengthening of national institutions and coordination among national law enforcement institutions;
- Regional and sub-regional cooperation that can assist national implementation of the Convention;
- National, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens; and toxins;
- Any potential further measures, as appropriate, relevant for implementation of the Convention.

The 1540 expert presented on “*United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Biological Weapons Convention: synergy in the area of non-proliferation and international cooperation for peaceful purposes*”. She noted that this was the first time the 1540 Committee was invited to present in the BWC plenary, proving the Chair’s motto of “bringing in more voices” to this forum.

The 1540 expert reminded delegates to the BWC MX the obligations on all States relating to resolution 1540 (2004) to adopt, *inter alia*, legislation to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons and their means of delivery, and establish appropriate domestic controls over related materials to prevent their illicit trafficking by non-State actors. She described the 1540 Committee work process and architecture and highlighted the synergy and convergence of BWC and resolution 1540 (2004) obligations on biosecurity and the similarity of the respective match-making roles on assistance of the BWC ISU and the 1540 Committee. In particular, she emphasized that there are several requests and offers of assistance in the 1540 Committee’s database that relate to the BWC implementation thus strengthening the coordination and sharing of experiences between the BWC ISU (as the clearinghouse for the Article X database of assistance) and the 1540 Group of experts is likely to benefit the respective assistance processes and maximize the use of limited resources while assisting States to effectively deal with countering biological threats.

At its closing session, States Parties adopted their report comprised of, as amended, a procedural report with an annex listing the considerations, lessons, perspectives, recommendations, conclusions and proposals drawn from the presentations, statements, working papers and interventions on the topics under discussion at the Meeting. The report and the official documents of the meeting are available online at: <http://www.unog.ch/bwc/meeting>

Continuing the practice of the prior intersessional process, the BWC MX featured a poster session with contributions from governmental and non-governmental organizations on subjects relevant to the topics under discussion at the MX.

There were also a series of side events organized during the MX, as follows:

- The Kings College London (KCL) organized an event to launch a report called 'Hard to Prove: Compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention' with presentations by Filippa Lentzos, Susan Martin and Wyn Bowen (all KCL) and chaired by Ambassador Matthew Rowland (UK). The report is at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/kpi/projects/secdefence/BWC-report2013.pdf>
- The University of Bradford, the US National Academies and the Landau Network-Centro Volta convened a meeting on 'Recent Advances in Biosecurity Education'. Presentations were given by Tatyana Novossiolova (Bradford), Gerald Walther (Bradford), Jo Husbands (National Academy of Science) and Dana Perkins (1540 Group of Experts). The event was chaired by Ambassador Urs Schmid (Switzerland).
- The Geneva Forum held the 'Science and Technology Mini-University' which entailed a public briefing on some of the science relevant to MX for non-scientists. Presentations were given by Meg L Flanagan (US Department of State) and David R Benson (University of Connecticut). The event was chaired by Kerstin Vignard (UNIDIR).
- Netherlands and Indonesia organized an event on 'Dealing with Dual Use Research of Concern'. Presentations were given by Herawati Sudoyo (Indonesian Academy of Sciences) and Koos van der Bruggen (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences). The event was chaired by Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast (Netherlands).
- The Convergence of biology and chemistry and opportunities for outreach and education was discussed at a side event organized by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the ISU. Introductory comments were given by Jonathan Forman (OPCW) and presentations were given by Stefan Mogl (Spiez Laboratory, Switzerland) and Alejandra Suárez (Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Instituto de Quimica Rosario – CONICET, Argentina). The event was chaired by Piers Millett (ISU).
- The United States held a side event on 'International Assistance for Public Health Emergencies' which was introduced by Christopher Park (US Department of State) with presentations by David Brett-Major (WHO), Jean-Francois Duperre (Public Health Agency Canada) and Jose Fernandez (US Department of Health and Human Services).

4. **Additional comments**

For further information, please contact the 1540 Committee's Group of Experts by e-mail at 1540experts@un.org.