

Information Note¹

- Event:** *Regional Workshop on National Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention for South and South-East Asia*
- Organizers:** The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) - Geneva, through the European Union's Action in Support of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC Action), and the Government of Malaysia
- Date and venue:** 3-4 September 2013, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Participants:** *States:* Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao's People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, United States; Viet Nam, Malaysia,
- International organizations:* 1540 Committee Group of Experts; European Union; INTERPOL; United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI); United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD)
- Non-Governmental Organizations, Industry, Academia, and Other Entities:* Asia-Pacific Biosafety Association (A-PBA); International Association for Counterterrorism and Security Professionals- Center for Security Studies (IACSP-CSS), Malaysia; Mahidol University, Thailand; Thailand Biosafety Association; University of Sussex, UK; Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), UK;
- Chairman, 2013 Meetings of the BWC:* Ms. Judit Körömi, Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary

1. **Objectives of the workshop**

The main objectives of the workshop were to enhance understanding of the BWC among national authorities, strengthen regional networking to promote implementation of the BWC, identification of requirements and needs for enhancing implementation of the BWC, and the creation of and/or support for national and regional biosafety associations. In order to reinforce capacities to implement the Convention at the national and regional level topics relevant to BWC implementation (such as legislation, control regimes, regulations, guidelines, enforcement and others) which are also overlapping significantly with the obligations under resolution 1540 (2004) and its provisions on domestic control of BW-related materials.

2. **Background**

The workshop is part of a series of such events to be organized in various regions under the auspices of the European Union Council's Decision in Support of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC Action) by the UNODA-Geneva (acting as the implementing agency) and national partners. The BWC Action was mandated by the Council decision 2012/421/CFSP, adopted on 23 July 2012 by the Council of the European Union. It is broadly anchored in the European Union's Common Position for the Seventh Review Conference of the BWC (Council Decision 2011/429/CFSP of 18 July 2011; available online at: [http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/FB77EE84B5729118C1257AC3003D9A5D/\\$file/Council](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/FB77EE84B5729118C1257AC3003D9A5D/$file/Council)

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+Decision+2011-429-CFSP+EU+Position+7RC.pdf) and focuses in particular on those aspects on which consensus was reached at the Seventh Review Conference held in 2011.

The BWC Action aims to support the BWC on the international, regional and national levels through three major projects: universality and national implementation; confidence in compliance; and strengthening international cooperation and encouraging international discussion on the future of the BWC.

The workshop was organized in four sessions (on ‘*National Implementation and Confidence Building Measures*’; ‘*Keeping Safe-Measures for Prevention*’; ‘*Keeping Safe-Measures for Mitigation*’; and ‘*Regional Initiatives and Activities in Support of BWC Implementation*’, respectively). The formal presentations were followed by roundtable discussions based on pre-determined questions related to national implementation and CBMs; biorisk management, biosafety and biosecurity; developments in science & technology; and national and regional preparedness. Participants were asked inter alia to answer the question whether States should “*coordinate CBRN legislation (omnibus CBRN law, a CBW law, a BTWC Act or manifold laws covering BTWC obligations (e.g. penal law, customs/border control, quarantine, human/animal/plant health etc.) and how to address overlap/synergies between BTWC, UNSCR 1540, IHR (2005), CWC*”.

Several participants noted in their presentations and discussions the overlap and synergy between the obligations of resolution 1540 (2004) and BWC and national implementation efforts to address them holistically. Joint participation of the 1540 Committee Group of Experts, EU/UNICRI CBRNE Centres of Excellence Initiative, and VERTIC representatives in the regional workshops organized under the EU’s BWC Action also serves to ensure coordinated outreach to national authorities in this regard.

In this regional workshop, the private-public partnership between governments and civil society (in particular the collaboration of governments with professional organizations such as national and regional biosafety/biosecurity organizations) in countering biological threats was highlighted throughout the event, by governmental and non-governmental representatives. In particular, the Malaysian government representatives discussed the role of Malaysian Biosafety and Biosecurity Association (MBBA) in complementing the government’s efforts on promoting a culture of biosecurity responsible conduct of science. MBBA was launched in July 2011 during the International BioSSD Congress in Kuala Lumpur, and is a non-profit voluntary organization with multi-sectoral membership (health, agriculture, academia, defense, corporate) that functions as “*a neutral platform to promote biosafety and biosecurity*”. Of note, such collaboration between governments and national biosafety/biosecurity associations was also reported in the latest national report received by the 1540 Committee from this region, specifically from Philippines.

Pursuant to a personal invitation from the University of Malaysia, the 1540 expert also had an opportunity to visit the research BSL-3 laboratory at the University of Malaysia and the clinical BSL-3 (for tuberculosis work) at the associated hospital, to discuss the implementation of biosafety/biosecurity measures in Malaysia for effective domestic control of BW-related materials.

3. **Highlights**

Welcome and opening remarks were given by Dato’ Saiful Azam Abdullah, Undersecretary, Multilateral Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia; Mr. Marcel Roijen, Political Counsellor, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. EU Delegation to Malaysia; and Ms. Karin Hjalmarsson, on behalf of Mr. Richard Lennane, Head, BWC Implementation Support Unit (BWC ISU), UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)- Geneva Branch.

Dato' Saiful Azam Abdullah, Undersecretary, Multilateral Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, emphasized that, as a nation, Malaysia has *“embarked on an exploration of the full potential of [bio]diversity through the powerful tools that bio-sciences provides. Malaysia has nurtured and built a network of 204 bio-companies, 90 in the agricultural bio-technology, 72 in healthcare and 42 in industrial biotechnology. Malaysia has provided the bio-market with access to research and development facilities by growing and sustaining a network of over 56 labs in publicly funded universities and research institutions.”* He also noted that *“the threat of biological risks is far more complex and far more real in today’s world. The world is no longer divided by ideological lines and states are no longer the only actors within the international milieu. The rapid advancements in global transportation has made the world smaller and more vulnerable...”*

On behalf of Mr. Richard Lennane, Head, BWC ISU), Ms. Karin Hjalmarsson (UNODA-Geneva Branch), pointed out that *“the workshop is not intended as a series of lectures, where visiting professors impart their wisdom, and everyone else quietly takes notes. It is not about telling the governments of South and South-East Asia what they should do, or about imposing the EU approach to BWC implementation. Rather, it is about discussing regional needs and circumstances, examining different approaches to shared challenges, looking at possible solutions and best practices in various settings, and generating ideas for constructive, practical action.”*

Ms. Judit Körömi, BWC Chair and Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hungary, delivered the keynote address. She emphasized the rapid regional advancements in biotechnology which have tremendous potential benefits for South and South-East Asia development and the increase in trade as well as in the exchange of personnel, equipment, technology and know-how in the region. Ms. Körömi noted that the BWC has an important role to play in developing regional capabilities for governance and control including coordination of efforts, within and across national systems, and incorporating the capacities and contributions of the different sectors.

With regard to the current (2012-2015) intersessional work program, Ms. Körömi emphasized that it is, being structured around 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. In addition, States Parties will also consider how to enable fuller participation in annual exchanges of information through the CBMs and how to strengthen efforts to respond to the alleged use of a biological weapon.

The theme of Ms. Körömi’s BWC chairmanship in 2013 is to *“bring in more voices”* to improve the process of preparing for the intersessional meetings, make more efficient and productive use of BWC meeting time, and enhance the practical value of the program to States Parties. As the Chair of the 2013 BWC Meetings (BWC Meeting of Experts held 12-16 August 2013 and upcoming BWC Meeting of States Parties to be held 9-16 December 2013), Ms. Körömi’s efforts are directed toward increasing the number of States Parties actively participating in the BWC meetings; broadening the range of participation within national delegations; extending engagement with states not party; and by continuing to engage the scientific community, academia, industry and relevant NGOs. The BWC Chair also noted the participation of Myanmar and Nepal (States non-parties to the BWC) in the recent BWC Meeting of Experts and their participation in this *Regional Workshop on National Implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention for South and South-East Asia*.

During the workshop, states such as Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, presented or discussed their BWC implementation measures. Afghanistan delivered a statement emphasizing the country’s commitment to meeting the obligations of BWC and resolution 1540 (2004). Several

States (including Malaysia and Philippines) emphasized the synergies between resolution 1540 (2004) and the BWC obligations.

The 1540 expert presented on “*United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Biological Weapons Convention: Perspectives from South and South-East Asia*” and on “*Biological Risk Management and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540: Implementation and Technical Assistance in South and South-East Asia*”, respectively. She also co-chaired the roundtable discussions for the workshop session on “*National Implementation and Confidence Enhancing Measures*” which was focused on the BWC legislative and regulatory framework, BWC National Authority, Aim and Role of Confidence-building Measures (CBMs), and the Process for submission of CBMs.

The 1540 expert noted that with the exception of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Philippines, and Singapore, all other reports to the 1540 Committee from the states in the region were from 2008 or older thus the committee would appreciate updated information on implementation of resolution 1540 (2004), some of that relevant information being already presented in this workshop. National points of contact have been submitted up to date to the committee from this region from Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, and the committee would appreciate other states following suit. In addition, Timor-Leste has yet to report to the 1540 Committee.

In a presentation reviewing the requests and offers for assistance in the bio area, the 1540 Expert noted the importance of engaging non-governmental stakeholders in addressing countering biological threats, and highlighted personal experiences in engaging with Malaysian Biosafety and Biosecurity Association Indonesian Academy of Sciences and the Asia-Pacific Biosafety Association. The 1540 expert emphasized that the requests for assistance from Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam are a few years old and the states’ feedback is appreciated with regard to the assistance received or offered in fulfilment (total or partial) of such requests submitted to the 1540 Committee. Pakistan’s offer of assistance including on BWC implementation was also highlighted in the expert’s presentation. The 1540 expert also noted that, in her opinion, strengthening the coordination and sharing of experiences between the 1540 Committee and the BWC ISU with regard to their respective assistance clearinghouse/matchmaking roles is likely to benefit the respective assistance processes and maximize the use of limited resources while assisting States to implement resolution 1540 (2004) and BWC and effectively deal with countering biological threats.

4. **Additional comments**

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