

**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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Review of the operation of the Convention

as provided for in its Article XII

Articles I-XV

**“Strengthening National, Sub-Regional and
International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond
to the Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons”: Final
Project Report**

Submitted by Japan

I. Introduction

1. In 2018, Japan provided a voluntary contribution of \$819,250 to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) towards a project on ‘Improving the preparedness of the United Nations (UN) Secretariat and relevant international organizations to ensure a coordinated international response to potential biological or chemical weapons use’. The project had two components:

- Sub-project 1 which focused on ‘Strengthening national, sub-regional and international capacities to prepare for and respond to deliberate use of biological weapons’ and was led by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC); and
- Sub-project 2 which sought to “Improve the preparedness of the United Nations to investigate allegations of the use of chemical or biological and toxin weapons” and was led by the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Branch of UNODA.

2. The activities conducted from November 2018 to December 2019 under sub-project 1 included three thematic seminars in Geneva, Switzerland and three regional workshops in Central and Southeast Asia. Comprehensive reports of each event were prepared by the ISU which are available on the BWC webpage.¹ In addition, working papers by Japan were presented to the 2019 and 2020 Meetings of Experts on Assistance, Response, and Preparedness.² These documents highlighted key issues which were raised in each of the events and informed about progress made towards the implementation of the project.

¹ [Current Activities Involving the Implementation Support Unit; Strengthening National, Regional and International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond to Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons](#).

² See [BWC/MSP/2020/MX.4/WP.1](#) - Strengthening National, Sub-Regional and International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond to the Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons: Project update – Submitted by Japan and [BWC/MSP/2019/MX.4/WP.4](#) - Strengthening National, Sub-Regional and International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond to the Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons: Project update – Submitted by Japan.



3. As noted in BWC/MSP/2020/MX.4/WP.1, two more events – another one-day thematic seminar in Geneva and a third regional workshop in Southeast Asia – were originally planned to be carried out in March 2020 but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking into account the project’s end date in March 2022 and the improving situation with respect to the pandemic, the Government of Japan and the ISU decided to organize a three-day capacity-building activity for representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from 29 to 31 March 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. It covered three one-day events with the following aims:

- ‘strengthening national, sub-regional and international capacities to prepare for and respond to deliberate use of biological weapons’ (29 March 2022, organized by the ISU);
- ‘strengthening the capacity of BWC National Contact Points (NCPs)’ (30 March 2022, organized by the ISU); and
- regional outreach workshop on the United Nations Secretary-General’s Mechanism for Investigations of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM), (sub-project 2; 31 March 2022, organized by UNODA’s WMD Branch).

4. This working paper informs about the remaining and final regional workshop carried out under sub-project 1 on 29 March 2022, as well as the launch of a dedicated publication on “Operationalising Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention”, which was held on 8 April 2022. Additionally, the paper presents some overarching conclusions from the implementation of sub-project 1.

II. Project Implementation

Regional capacity-building workshop (Geneva, Switzerland)

5. The regional capacity-building workshop for the ASEAN States Parties to the BWC on 29 March 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland constituted the final activity of the project’s capacity-building events from 2018 to 2022. The event aimed at supporting ASEAN Member States in their efforts to strengthen assistance, response and preparedness capacities in case of the use or threat of use of biological weapons, as well as provided a platform to review the operationalization of Article VII of the Convention. Thirty-four participants, including from six ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) attended the workshop.

6. The workshop had four thematic sessions. In the first session, following an introduction of the history and rationale for Article VII, representatives from South Africa and France presented their proposals to operationalize the article’s provisions: proposals for a triggering mechanism for Article VII and an assistance database to address requests and offers of assistance. This was followed by the workshop’s second session on transferable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for BWC States Parties in their preparedness efforts in case of a deliberate biological incident. The third session was dedicated to a tabletop exercise (TTX), designed and delivered by experts from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security (JHCHS). The TTX was based on a multi-sectoral and gradual response to a biological incident with an unknown origin, where the participants played roles of respective national agencies involved in the response process. The final and fourth workshop session consisted of a panel discussion on gender equality in disarmament in which representatives of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the Permanent Mission of Panama in Geneva and a regional expert provided their insights.

7. In the course of the workshop, the following issues, were, inter alia, highlighted:

- Discussions acknowledged the political sensitivity of triggering Article VII because it presumes that a major violation of the Convention has taken place. Participants also noted that the provisions of Article VII serve as a deterrent for any potential violator and they can also be seen as an element of international solidarity in response to a deliberate biological event.

- Participants noted the current lack of operationalization of Article VII, including the absence of more specific, agreed processes and procedures, as well as any timeframes for launching and delivering assistance under Article VII. Additionally, discussions also highlighted that States Parties may chose also other routes, such as calling for a consultative meeting under Article V, lodging a formal complaint under Article VI or even seeking assistance from other States Parties, regional or international organizations without invoking Article VII.
- Attendees stressed the importance of making progress with respect to operationalizing Article VII, including through formalizing or reaching common understandings on key steps and actions to be undertaken when requesting or offering assistance in the framework of Article VII. In this regard, the usefulness of the South Africa proposal³ on a set of voluntary guidelines to assist a State Party when submitting a request or application for assistance was acknowledged.
- Workshop participants also recognised the benefits of establishing an assistance database⁴ in the framework of Article VII, as proposed by France and India. It was highlighted that putting in place such a tool could serve as another concrete step to operationalize Article VII. The database would serve as a registry of assistance resources and also facilitate the matchmaking of requests and offers of assistance. In the ensuing discussions, experts also addressed the concrete resources and capacities which could potentially be provided by their countries in case of a deliberate biological event.
- Participants also exchanged views on transferable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for the BWC and highlighted both positive and negative examples. As regards the former, the sharing of samples, genomic sequences, and epidemiological data as part of an overall information sharing and collaboration approach among the scientific community across the globe was noted. On the other hand, criticism was expressed towards nationalistic and/or business-oriented approaches to the response process (e.g. restrictions on exports of critical goods, hoarding of supplies, donations of vaccines only after domestic populations were protected or the lack of commitment to global coordination including equitable allocation of resources) that were implemented particularly during the early phase of pandemic. Furthermore, experts discussed the implications of these measures in case of a deliberate event and underlined the importance of capacity-building for disease surveillance and the exchange of equipment, material information for peaceful purposes in line with Article X. Participants also shared national experiences with respect to risk communication challenges, particularly the spread of misinformation and disinformation by social media during the pandemic and strategies adopted to counter them.
- The TTX scenario was designed to stimulate discussion on challenges related to preparedness and response capacities and policies for deliberate biological events, including on operationalizing Article VII. It guided the participants through various aspects of outbreak response, initially focusing on healthcare and public health challenges and then shifting toward response to a suspected deliberate biological event as further evidence emerged. Eventually, the scenario culminated with a discussion on Article VII, specifically if and how a request for assistance would be invoked. The exercise highlighted a broad scope of challenges with national and regional preparedness and response capacity for deliberate biological events as well as numerous questions regarding operational processes under the BWC.
- The biggest TTX takeaway was the need for more concrete direction on how to practically launch and implement associated requests for assistance under Article VII. Many questions were raised about how to submit such requests—

³ [BWC/CONF.IX/PC/WP.7](#) - Implementation of Article VII - Submitted by South Africa.

⁴ [BWC/MSP/2020/WP.3](#) - Proposal for the establishment of a database for assistance under Article VII of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention - Submitted by France and India.

and to whom—and how to identify potential sources for the types of assistance needed. The participants also identified parallels between the TTX and the COVID-19 response. In particular, participants cited the lack of medical countermeasures early in the outbreak, the threat posed to local health systems by an intense patient surge, and the challenge of combating mis- and disinformation. Additionally, the participants also emphasized the importance of a multisectoral approach to the national response, while the composition and lead agencies varied by country.

- The panel discussion on gender and the BWC was kicked off by UNIDIR and highlighted the importance of applying a gender lens for improving response strategies following a disease outbreak. In this regard, participants acknowledged the crucial role of women in a response operation. During the panel discussion, participants were also informed about and discussed recommendations stemming from a working paper⁵ submitted by Panama which advocates the importance of enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment as an integral part of institutional strengthening of the BWC. Furthermore, one of the national experts presented about gender equality related challenges in view of local social-cultural norms.

Launch of Article VII Publication (Geneva, Switzerland)

8. In addition to the four regional workshops and three seminars carried out during the sub-project's implementation, the government of Japan agreed to provide funding for a publication on "[Operationalising Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention](#)". The document, which has been prepared in view of the upcoming Ninth Review Conference in November/December 2022, summarizes the current state of reflection on the operationalisation of Article VII. The ideas and commentaries therein are meant to stimulate understanding of issues and future reflection but do not prejudice deliberations by States Parties.

9. Twelve international experts from across the globe analysed various Article VII related aspects in nine chapters:

- On the origins of Article VII
- The evolution of Article VII
- Triggering Article VII: Procedural options and issues to resolve
- The importance of international cooperation activities (Article X) in the effective operationalisation of assistance and protection measures (Article VII)
- Evidence to provide when requesting Article VII assistance
- Emergency assistance: Insights from the Chemical Weapons Convention
- Preparedness against major disease outbreaks in Africa since the Ebola epidemic
- The COVID-19 pandemic and early detection of unusual events: Lessons from and for the BWC
- Increasing assistance and response capacities: What role for international organisations?

10. The publication was officially launched at a side event co-organized by the Government of Japan and the ISU on the margins of the Preparatory Committee to the Ninth Review Conference on 8 April 2022. More than 50 representatives from approximately 20 States Parties, international organizations and civil society participated in the event and acknowledged the value of the publication.

⁵ [BWC/CONF.IX/PC/WP.8](#) - Enhancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as an Integral Part of the Institutional Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) - Submitted by Panama.

IV. Conclusion

11. The sub-project on ‘strengthening national, sub-regional and international capacities to prepare for and respond to deliberate use of biological weapons’ served as a capacity-building tool to enhance operational and policy related capacities of BWC States Parties with a particular focus on Central and Southeast Asia. This was done through a range of activities, including the sharing of best practices on assistance, response and preparedness related issues among States Parties, strengthening collaboration and cooperation with relevant international and regional organizations, as well as feeding lessons and suggestions into the discussions at the 2018, 2019 and 2020 Meetings of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness.

12. A total of seven in-person activities - four regional workshops in Asia and three seminars in Geneva – were carried out between November 2018 and March 2022. 191 representatives from 14 States Parties in Southeast and Central Asia participated in the four workshops, while 207 representatives from 65 States Parties, nine regional/international organizations and seven academic institutions and NGOs attended the Geneva seminars. Overall, the sub-project reached almost 400 experts from a diverse group of stakeholders – including the security, public health, scientific/technical and diplomatic community - throughout its implementation phase, thereby providing an opportunity to exchange best practices, strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration at the national, regional and international level and obtain a deeper understanding on crucial issues related to preparedness and response in case of deliberate bio-incidents.

13. Various didactical methods such as the delivery of 23 thematic presentations, five case studies, four tabletop exercises, three active learning sessions/group works, three panel discussions and one practical demonstration were used to share best practices on operational and policy issues during the regional workshops. Furthermore, 43 speakers representing twelve States Parties, nine regional/international organizations, three academic institutions, and three NGOs presented at the seminars in Geneva.

14. While Article VII has been repeatedly on the agenda of previous Meetings of Experts and has gained more attention particularly in light of the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in 2014-2016 and the COVID-19 pandemic, its provisions remain yet to be operationalized. At the same time, a number of concrete proposals have been introduced over the last years and discussed since then in depth by States Parties. The sub-project provided a valuable platform for introducing and discussing these proposals in an informal setting, which in turn helped to further converge views on these concrete suggestions to operationalize Article VII.

15. As repeatedly highlighted by invited expert speakers and participants during the project implementation, investment in preventive and preparedness measures is far more economical than efforts to contain the spread of a disease outbreak and mitigate its consequences. In this regard, the sub-project specifically addressed disease monitoring and alert mechanisms and respective lessons for the BWC, as well as the establishment of rapid response teams at the national, regional and international level in dedicated one-day seminars. Furthermore, the sub-project also included in one of the regional workshops a dedicated session on public messaging and risk communication. These activities brought up important lessons for strengthening existing capacities in BWC States Parties, which were also evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

16. The sub-project also highlighted the importance of cooperation and assistance at the bilateral, regional and international levels and noted the need for further and continued efforts in this area. Discussions also underlined the potential synergies between Article VII and Article X, with the latter enabling States Parties to strengthen national preparedness and response capacities, including in the area of early detection, identification and response. In this regard, the sub-project helped to inform about capacities and cooperation and assistance opportunities with relevant international organisations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the International Plant Protection Convention, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Additionally, the events provided a platform for information exchange and potential collaboration with relevant regional entities such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union Chemical Biological

Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Besides UNODA, other UN entities such as UNIDIR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs contributed to the events.

17. Furthermore, scientific and technical contributions from recognized educational institutions, most notably the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security brought additional value to the sub-project's implementation and helped to inform participants about the latest trends in science and technology that are of relevance to the Convention.

18. The sub-project outputs fed into the discussions at the 2018, 2019 and 2020 Meetings of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness and also feed into preparations for the upcoming Ninth Review Conference through the preparation of three working papers, one publication on the operationalization of Article VII, as well as the conduct of side events in 2019 and 2022.

19. The Government of Japan expresses its appreciation to the Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia and Thailand for their hosting of the regional workshops, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy for co-organizing the thematic seminars in Geneva and all States Parties, regional and international organizations, UN entities, academic institutions and NGOs that actively contributed to the events. It is hoped that the sub-project has helped to raise awareness about Article VII, advance efforts towards its operationalization and strengthen national, sub-regional and international capacities to prepare for and respond to deliberate use of biological weapons.
