

Formal Consultative Meeting 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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Item 6 of the agenda

**Respective outstanding questions by the Russian Federation
to the United States and to Ukraine concerning the fulfilment
of their respective obligations under the Convention in the context
of the operation of biological laboratories in Ukraine**

Statement by Canada to Formal Article V Consultative Meeting of BTWC States Parties

Submitted by Canada

1. Over the past two days, we listened attentively to presentations delivered by the delegation of the Russian Federation, alleging that the United States supported inappropriate activities at biological facilities in Ukraine, in violation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). We paid equally close attention to the responses provided by Ukraine and the United States. Based on the nature and credibility of the respective materials provided, we have reached the unambiguous conclusion that activities supported by the United States in Ukraine were fully consistent with the spirit and letter of the BTWC, and that Russia's allegations are unfounded, disingenuous and damaging to the integrity of the BTWC itself.
2. The 18th century English poet Alexander Pope once wrote that "he who tells a lie is not sensible to how great a task he undertakes, for he must be forced to invent twenty more to maintain that one". This seems an apt appraisal of the case presented here, for to support the fundamental disinformation charge that the United States and Ukraine violated the BTWC, Russia was compelled to manufacture and misrepresent dozens of other aspects of longstanding biological collaboration between the United States and Ukraine.
3. Disinformation of this nature is not new. In the history of the BTWC – and even predating its advent – there are many examples of countries levelling false allegations against others about bioweapons activities or creating fictitious narratives to conceal their own efforts.
4. Of relevance to these consultations, Canada was the target of a biological disinformation campaign in 2011. As outlined in a working paper submitted to this meeting (BWC/CONS/2022/WP.5), an ambitious collaboration between Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to construct a new human & animal health facility in Bishkek was targeted by an aggressive, sustained and completely unfounded disinformation campaign. The campaign was led by a relatively small group of protestors, who Canada assessed to have ulterior motives and to be supported and encouraged by external backers. As outlined in our working paper, after five years of productive bilateral cooperation on this \$60 million Project, Canada was denounced for building a "Laboratory of Death". False charges were made about the bilateral agreement between Canada and the Kyrgyz Republic and Canada was accused of planning to develop bioweapons in the new lab and to dump dangerous pathogens in the Kyrgyz Republic. This false and malicious narrative may sound familiar to those attending these Article V consultations.



5. The end result was that continuation of the lab project proved untenable and cooperation was terminated. That outcome was regrettable, for the lab would have provided enormous health-security benefits for the Kyrgyz Republic, the region and globally. The disinformation experience also influenced Canada's decision to redirect its bio-threat reduction and Article X relevant activities away from Central Asia to other regions.

6. As this example illustrates, and as this week's consultations further underscore, disinformation campaigns strike at the heart of a core provision of the BTWC - Article X. The defamation of transparent and mutually beneficial collaboration between States Parties for the "development and application of scientific discoveries for prevention of disease, or for other peaceful purposes", as called for under Article X, is in fact an assault on section 2 of that same article, which stipulates that States Parties should avoid hampering cooperation. By falsely characterizing as inappropriate the biological cooperation between the U.S and Ukraine, Russia itself is undermining Article X cooperation.

7. How so? What State Party will elect to pursue Article X related activities in a BTWC partner country if those activities may be denounced as illicit and inappropriate? By this logic, many ongoing collaborations between Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program and partner countries could similarly be questioned, including projects on Lassa Fever with Nigeria, Ebola Virus Disease with Sierra Leone and Foot and Mouth Disease and Anthrax with Ghana. Likewise, projects we are supporting to strengthen biosafety, biosecurity and surveillance for high consequence pathogens in the Middle East, across the Caribbean, throughout Africa and with all 10 ASEAN member states could be targeted. We are confident that the vast majority of BTWC States Parties will wish to avoid a scenario where the future of such valuable, beneficial and much-needed Article X collaboration is called into question.

8. Finally, Mr. Chairman, we note the irony of the Russian Federation questioning the legitimacy of peaceful biological collaboration when – as highlighted yesterday by Ukraine and the U.S. - it actively participated in similar activities as a former member of both the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) and the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. Through these initiatives, Canada supported many projects at bio labs in Russia, including at facilities implicated in the Soviet Union's offensive BW program, that involved work similar to that called into question by Russia this week. It is worth noting that the ISTC itself recently issued a statement, available on its website, that reads in part:

"As part of its ongoing disinformation campaign, the Russian Federation has accused the ISTC, as well as its sister center, the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU), of being involved in the development of biological weapons. These accusations are part of the Russian government's absurd attempt to provide a plausible rationale for its unjust and unprovoked war against Ukraine. They are blatantly false and have been discredited numerous times. Until 2015, the Russian Federation hosted the ISTC and benefitted from approximately \$1.5 billion of funding from states parties to the ISTC, including the U.S and the EU, to support Russian weapons scientists—including Russian biological scientists—in their transition to peaceful research. During the two-plus decades that Russia was an ISTC Party and ISTC Governing Board member, the Russian Federation directly approved the very same ISTC biological research and infrastructure projects that Russia is now slandering".

Thank you Mr. Chairman.
