

# 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

17 August 2021

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## 2020 Meeting

Geneva, 22-25 November 2021

## Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response, and Preparedness

Geneva, 6-7 September 2021

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Procedures, including the establishment and use of the assistance database, to improve the prompt and efficient response without preconditions to a request of assistance by a State Party under Article VII, and coordination and cooperation among States Parties and with relevant international and regional organizations such as World Health Organization (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as appropriate**

## **Proposal for the establishment of a database for assistance under Article VII of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: specific pending issues and way forward for the operationalization of the proposal**

**Submitted by India and France**

### **I. Introduction**

1. India and France submitted a proposal for the establishment of a database for assistance in the framework of Article VII at the 2018 BTWC Meeting of States Parties. The proposal is for the BWC ISU to establish, administer and maintain a database on a secure web-based platform and to be hosted on the BWC ISU website. It will be open to all States Parties and would contribute to the implementation of Article VII of the BTWC and allow matching specific offers and requests for assistance. States Parties are invited to agree at the Ninth Review Conference to the establishment of an article VII database.

2. The proposal seeks to respond to the need for developing effective measures and coordination with relevant international organizations to respond to biological or toxin weapons occurrences, while providing benefits to States Parties in terms of awareness, information exchange, national and international preparedness, and capacity-building for such an event. The database would include assistance in various forms including emergency assistance, containment measures and recovery assistance. The database would also serve as a concrete incentive for universalization of the Convention by providing a roadmap for operationalizing Article VII. The establishment of a voluntary trust fund under Article VII may also be considered.

3. In 2020, with the support of the BWC ISU, an analysis of lessons learned from assistance databases utilized in relevant international organizations was conducted to identify and outline issues and to draw lessons for the further development of the database concept. In order to continue to contribute to the preparatory work for the database proposal, a series of three virtual workshops were conducted during spring 2021 with the support of the BWC



ISU to identify and discuss with State parties, international organizations and civil society specific issues that remain to be addressed. This provided a useful opportunity for exchange of views among States Parties on key issues including objectives and content of the Article VII database, that need to be addressed for the operationalization of the proposal.

4. Reaching common understanding on the objectives and content of an Article VII database involves addressing the following: (i) objectives and functions; (ii) types of assistance; (iii) categories of assistance resources; (iv) users and access.

## **II. Objectives and Content of an Article VII Database**

### **Database objectives and functions:**

- The Article VII database includes objectives and functions related to information exchange, the registry of assistance resources for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon.
- It also contributes to national and international preparedness to the use of a biological or toxin weapon, notably through the matchmaking of requests and offers of assistance, in coordination with relevant international organizations, while promoting public awareness on related issues.

### **Types of assistance that may be registered, requested and/or offered by States Parties:**

- To avoid any duplication with the Article X database and to respect the scope of each article of the Convention, the Article VII database will only deal with types of assistance related to preparing and responding to the use of biological or toxin weapons;
- the Article VII database will be flexible regarding the types of assistance that may be registered, offered and/or requested which could for instance include information, rosters of experts or specialized institutions, capacity-building, field teams, off-field services, equipment, and funding;
- the possibility of establishing a voluntary trust fund for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon will require particular attention by States Parties.

### **Categories of assistance resources or capabilities that may be registered, requested and/or offered, which can be categorized in three main fields:**

- Non-monetary contributions, among which expertise and information sharing;
- pre-exposure preparedness capacity building, among which protection and detection, through every relevant means available, including for instance, pre-emptive training modules or population awareness and response;
- post exposure response assistance, among which decontamination, prophylactic, if any, and containment measures.

### **Users and access:**

- The database will be open for users from Government agencies of States Parties or other entities nominated through official channels (eg Permanent Missions, designated National Contact Points in States Parties etc);
- users from international organizations (IO) through the designated contact point in relevant organizations;

- users from NGOs, if registered as users by designated contact points in State Parties;
- the database content will be only accessible to State Parties and IOs. Similar to the agreed approach for the existing Article X database, registered resources ranging from information to capacity building, expertise and equipment could be made publicly available. The offering State Party may indicate the type and scope of their assistance. Access to workflows for requests and specific offers of assistance would be limited to the designated users.

### III. Modular Approach to Database Development

5. A modular approach in the development of an Article VII database is advisable to facilitate the early introduction of the tool which is meant to be an operational tool. More sophisticated features or functions could be implemented in later phases, taking into account feedback provided by users, and could be at the agenda of the next intersessional program.

6. A first phase could focus on the **registration of users and assistance resources**, that is, on identifying and registering contact points and users in States Parties and relevant international organizations and start collecting information and registering assistance resources. This would allow addressing one of the main challenges in assistance response mechanisms, namely identifying the availability and readiness of assistance resources.

7. A second phase would then focus on **implementing requests for assistance and interactive matchmaking functions in connection with preparedness and capacity-building related measures**. During this phase mechanisms and tools for facilitating needs assessments in States Parties, and for conducting gap analyses concerning the availability of registered assistance resources could be developed. Furthermore, options for online coordination of training events among States Parties or the conduct of virtual simulations or exercises could also be considered in this phase.

8. Finally, a third phase would focus on **implementing requests for assistance and interactive matchmaking functions in a response scenario**, subject to the development by States Parties of procedures for requests and offers of assistance and eventually for response coordination.

### IV. Future Steps

9. India and France are keen to have a milestone approach comprising inclusive discussions with all States parties to the Convention to produce an updated version of the proposal, incorporating their feedback and views.

10. The Meeting of Experts dedicated to assistance and response (MX4) of the BWC, will constitute a key step to consult all States parties before publishing a final proposal aiming at giving every State party the chance to contribute and provide inputs.

11. This *non paper* aims to seek and facilitate contributions of States Parties on specific issues that remain to be addressed by States Parties for the operationalization of the proposal and adoption of an enabling decision to be adopted by consensus by the Ninth Review Conference of the BWC.

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