

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

1 September 2021

English and Russian only

2020 Meeting

Geneva, 22-25 November 2021

Meeting of Experts on Institutional strengthening of the Convention Geneva, 8 September 2021

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Consideration of the full range of approaches and options to further strengthen the Convention and its functioning through possible additional legal measures or other measures in the framework of the Convention

III International research and practical Conference "Global Biosecurity Challenges. Problems and Solutions" (Sochi, 24-25 June 2021)

Submitted by the Russian Federation

1. The III International research and practical Conference "Global Biosecurity Challenges. Problems and Solutions" (hereinafter "the Conference") jointly organized by the Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took place in Sochi on 24-25 June 2021. Over 300 participants from 30 countries, international organizations (UN, WHO, OIE, SCO, EAEU, CIS), and non-governmental expert community substantively reviewed in a hybrid format the issue of counteracting biological threats associated with the spread of infectious diseases of various origins.
2. The delegates discussed the emerging challenges related to response to the outbreaks of infectious diseases, prospects of strengthening the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BWC) as well as profile developments in science and technology. The importance to improve training of specialists in the field of biological safety and biological security was underlined.
3. Emphasis was placed on the exchange of expertise in fighting the pandemic of the new coronavirus infection that became the first global challenge to biosecurity of such scale at the current stage. In this context, the examples of international cooperation in assisting the COVID-19 counteraction were considered.
4. The key value of BWC as a fundamental tool of international law was confirmed both to prohibit the whole category of weapons of mass destruction and to create opportunities to develop international cooperation in fighting diseases as well as for other peaceful purposes.
5. The participants were informed about best Russian practices and developments in the area of ensuring the biological security as well as the latest achievements in the field of



prevention and diagnosis of infections, and specifically COVID-19, including the newest Russian mobile medical and biological emergency formations of the Rospotrebnadzor and the Ministry of Defense of Russia.

6. The issue of preparations to the forthcoming 9th BWC Review Conference in 2022 received consideration as well. The importance of creating mechanisms to systemically and institutionally strengthen the Convention regime was highlighted. To this end, expert work should be continued to agree at the inter-state level and adopt the relevant initiatives at the 9th Review Conference.

7. The following four parallel sections were arranged during the Conference:

- Preparedness, response and assistance in the framework of BWC and the role of mobile anti-epidemic units, moderator Ms. Arline Díaz Mendoza, Counselor to the Permanent Mission of Venezuela to the UN Office in Geneva;
- International cooperation in the framework of BWC, moderator Dr. Anastasia Malygina, associate professor at the School of Theory and History of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University;
- The role of the review of scientific and technological achievements and its possible mechanisms in the framework of BWC, moderator Mr. Vladimir Ladanov, Chief of the Branch of the Third Asian Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia;
- BWC institutional strengthening and 9th Review Conference possible outcomes, moderator Mr. Konstantin Vorontsov, Acting Deputy Director of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.

8. Summaries of discussions, as individually prepared by the moderators, are found in the Annex to this working paper.

9. The key points of the event are provided in the concluding statement of the co-chairs of the Conference.

10. Provided on a regular basis by the Russian Federation, the conference platform in Sochi stands to contribute to strengthening and improving BWC implementation and promoting the elaboration of consolidated positions by the States Parties in the run-up to the 9th Review Conference. The fourth Conference will take place in two years and will assess the progress in the implementation of agreements reached at the 9th Review Conference, as well as promote inter-sessional work within BWC.

Annex

Panel 1. Moderator's summary

Preparedness, response and assistance in the framework of BWC

Mobile anti-epidemic formations

Moderator: Ms. Arline Diaz Mendoza, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

Summary of the discussions

I would like to start my presentation recognizing the efforts of the Government of the Russian Federation for organizing the Third International Conference “Global Biosecurity Challenges: Problems and Solutions”. I am confident that the discussions on this Conference will contribute to the work and the preparation for the upcoming Review Conference of the BWC.

It was an honour to moderate the Session No. 1 entitled “Preparedness, response and assistance in the framework of BWC”, with a very distinguished group of panelists, both in person and those who accompanied us virtually. In addition, I would like to appreciate the gender balance among the panelists during this session.

During the rich discussions took place a broad recognition of the challenges that the implementation of Article VII faces, as well as widespread support concerning the need to make progress in the 9th Review Conference of the BWC in relation with its operationalization. I will try to capture the main points of each presentation.

1. Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Permanent Representative of Pakistan Mission to the UNOG and Conference on Disarmament, who accompanied us virtually

Ambassador Hashmi expressed that there is an obligation under the BWC to provide timely and effective assistance in case a State Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention leading to the outbreak of diseases and toxins that may harm humans, animals, plants or the environment.

Also, highlighted that the provision of such assistance should not be conditional to the action or finding by the UN Security Council with respect to the investigation of alleged use. Assistance should be provided promptly on the basis of the request by the affected state.

Ambassador Hashmi indicated that currently there is lack of institutional and operational structures within the BWC to give effect to Article VII. To that end there is a need of a specific mechanism within the Convention which would then pave the way for concrete and practical measures, and among these practical measures would also include the Russian Federation proposal on mobile bio-medical units. Also, expressed that there is a need to work on establishing a set of guidelines and formats to assist a State Party submitting an application

for assistance under Article VII and further explore synergies between Article VII and Article X.

2. Oleg Storozhenko, from the World Health Organization (WHO), who made a presentation on the Rapid Response Mobile Laboratories (RRML/GOARN) minimum standards and simulation exercise program

Mr. Storozhenko explained the Rapid Response Mobile Laboratories (RRMLs) play a crucial role in rapidly responding to and monitoring emergency events and outbreaks within and beyond the WHO European Region. The Rapid Response Mobile Laboratories will strengthen international Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) responses, as well as responses that are coordinated through other mechanisms, and the RRML response for broader biological hazards and not just high-consequence pathogens.

Indicated that RRMLs present a classification system when used in biological events, and the potential deployment and use of RRMLs to cover outbreak detection and response, natural or man-made disasters, and preparedness for mass-gathering events. This classification covers five levels of RRML capacities: Type I (ultra light), Type II (light), Type III (moderate), Type IV (high) and Type V (multiunit).

Also, informed that in August 2021, they will conduct a Simulation Exercise, and the objectives, among others, is a) Test minimum standards for RRMLs/GOARN, b) to provide a platform for knowledge and capacity transfer, and c) advocate for RRMLs as a key part of the GOARN and WHO rapid response capacities.

3. Galina Kovaleva, Deputy General Director for Epidemiology and Production, National Center of Public Health Care of the Health Ministry of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Ms. Kovaleva informed about the effectiveness of using mobile laboratories in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, indicated that the objective is to ensure the biological safety of the country, development, and implementation of scientific foundations for monitoring, prevention, assessment of the risk of human infection with especially dangerous infections on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan to prevent and reduce diseases of people and animals.

In relation to the mobile laboratories assembled in Kazakhstan, indicated that Laboratories were purchased at the expense of the Ministry of Health as part of strengthening the sanitary and epidemiological service and increasing readiness for rapid response and elimination of outbreaks of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. These are full-fledged PCR laboratories, equipped with boxes of the second level of biological protection, autonomous power supply, and the necessary set of consumables.

Mobile laboratories are capable of performing a full range of laboratory tests for especially dangerous infections in the field, working autonomously and as supported stationary laboratories at medical institutions in the outbreaks centers for infectious diseases.

Ms. Kovaleva highlighted the importance of cooperation to response the emergency and the mobile laboratories have convincingly proven their effectiveness and relevance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Ms. Subhashini Narayanan, Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of India to the Conference on Disarmament

Ms. Narayanan explained that India and France submitted a proposal for establishment of a database for assistance in the framework of Article VII of the BWC to the Prep Com to the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. In 2018, India and France resubmitted their Working Paper to the MSP and discussions on the proposal have taken place during the intersessional period. In 2021 a series of workshops have been held to gather key inputs and feedback on the proposal from State Parties.

The proposal envisages an Article VII database to act as a useful clearing house tool for matching assistance requests and offers for assistance registered in the database. The BWC ISU would establish, administer and maintain the database that would be open and accessible to all States Parties. The types of assistance may be in various forms including emergency assistance, containment measures and recovery assistance and the database will also contain information pertaining to pre-exposure preparedness and capacity building, non-monetary contributions including expertise and information sharing, post exposure response, namely decontamination, prophylactic or containment measures.

In addition, Ms. Narayanan indicated that States Parties need to consider and agree upon various aspects of the database including objectives, functions, types and categories of offers and requests for assistance, strengthening of the ISU, resource implications, database user and access management and so on.

5. Mr. Vyacheslav Smolenskiy, Deputy Head of Rospotrebnadzor

Mr. Smolenskiy expressed that consequently, the Russian Federation presented in the framework of BWC proposals for strengthening the Convention, for example, the mobile biomedical units. Explained that the objectives of this proposal is the advancement of international cooperation for prevention of infectious disease pursuant to Article X; and also provision of assistance and delivery of protection against biological weapons pursuant to Article VII, in terms of preparedness for an event, and capacity building.

Mr. Smolenskiy highlighted that there is a proof that this mobile lab is something that cannot be replaced. The mobile units are flexible and respond to the fact that not always countries have the capability to create a physical laboratory.

Also, informed that the equipment has been updated periodically to be in line with biosecurity. Another advantage is that they can adjust their proposal, and tailor on the needs of each country. The bio-medical units have been part of the response of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, this proposal combines the collective security and the promotion of international cooperation for peaceful purposes. Such convergence would result in creating an institutional basis for strengthening the BWC in a number of important areas.

6. Ms. Lebogang Phihlela, Deputy Director: Non-Proliferation, Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

Ms. Phihlela resumed the working paper submitted by South Africa during the Intersessional Program (ISP). Indicated that the WP was submitted in an effort to operationalize the Article by providing guidelines to assist a State Party when submitting an application for assistance in case of an alleged use of a biological weapon. The paper contained information that the requesting State Party could provide together with the request/application for assistance.

They believe that information would be useful to State Parties in their preparation to provide the assistance and would also assist the UNSC to make a prompt decision regarding the provision of assistance.

Also, informed that the working paper contained a list of information that could be supplied with the application. Furthermore, the working paper also highlighted the options that a State Party could follow in order to request for assistance when subjected to an alleged use of a biological weapons.

The speaker indicated that their working paper exclusively focuses on guidelines for requesting assistance under Article VII but the paper also highlights other important factors to consider when it comes to a States preparedness to manage and respond to outbreaks, which include inter alia: review of legislation regarding licensing requirements for health care personnel, handling of samples and level of response required.

7. Mr. Heinz Ellerbrock, Head of the Laboratory Department of the Robert Koch Institute

The Robert Koch Institute has been dedicated to the investigation and prevention of infectious diseases for quite long time. Today, the institute is also responsible for nationwide health monitoring – the collected data is included in the health reporting of the federal government. The institute is partner for public health institutions worldwide when it comes to the exchange of experience regarding the management of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mr. Ellerbrock indicated that the Institute has parallel preparedness projects in Liberia and other countries in Africa, dealing with Ebola outbreaks. Also they are developing a matrix dependent on the request, on different types of laboratories and tools. Informed that they are engaged mostly now focusing in COVID19, and offer 2 types of support: a) capacity building for lab diagnosis and b) emergency support: deployment of labs and personnel, based on bilateral requests.

From our session today, we can summarize that there is concern, and there is a need to make progress with the operationalization of Article VII of the BWC. Various proposals aimed at contributing towards that goal were presented for this purpose.

I thank you.

Panel 2. Moderator's summary

International cooperation in the framework of BWC

Seven reports were provided during the session within Panel 2 related to the international cooperation within BWC.

Statements were made by the representative of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs as well as by the representatives of the scientific community and governmental structures responsible for biological security from the delegations of China, Russia, United States, Uzbekistan and Venezuela.

The speaker from the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs emphasized in her statement the relevance of international assistance under BWC Article X. In this context, it was noted that the common international database on international cooperation under BWC Article X is already working and continues to evolve. It is important that the database be complemented by expert organizations ready to provide corresponding assistance as well as to get feedback from those states that received the needed assistance after placing request. Such exchange of

information flows would promote the efficiency of the common international database mechanism under BWC Article X.

The US representative noted in his report that the academic circles in the US consider it highly promising to cooperate under scientific programs, including in bilateral format with Russia. Such common work could reduce tensions and promote the exchange of technologies.

The speaker from Venezuela focused largely on the issue of exchange of technologies. It was noted that there is a need to move towards equal access to scientific and technological developments in the area of life sciences.

The Russian participant noted in the statement that the international assistance is growing in diversity today. One of the relevant directions is support to diagnostic research. The COVID epidemic has proved the importance of this area of cooperation.

Besides, the participants shared their experience in strengthening laboratory networks and providing assistance to other countries, including in laboratory support, test-systems delivery, equipment and technologies, experts training. The panelist from Uzbekistan noted that the cooperation could be multifaceted within various international organizations. The BWC is the only international document to regulate interaction between countries in the area of biological safety and security, including safe functioning of laboratories and biological production. The representative from China informed that the Chinese party prepared a new working document on the implementation of BWC Article X and that those proposals were at that moment under consideration in the United Nations. The representative from China also emphasized the relevance of creating a database under BWC Article X, outlined the elements of assistance that China provided to other countries in fighting COVID-19 epidemic.

For the education and upgrade training for specialists, such cooperation could be implemented in a number of directions, starting from personnel training to joint exercises aimed at working out epidemiological emergency response.

Another area of the advanced international cooperation under BWC Article X could be improvement of regional and national practices to train new generations of professionals that will face in their work the issues falling under the BWC. The elaboration of a relevant road map could draw on the best practices developed under the NPT and CWC. The educational programmes under the BWC and biological security would be usefully developed based on such principles as inclusiveness (equal representation of views from different regions of the world), cross-sector approach (balance of social and natural science subjects), freedom from political bias in all its aspects, respect for export controls as well as for the UNSC resolution 1540.

In summary, it was a productive dialogue that allowed to establish points of mutual understanding between representatives of different interested structures, both governmental and non-governmental from various BWC States Parties. The results of the deliberations allow to state that, as for the discussions of provisions of BWC Article X, there are most probably aspects providing grounds for joint decisions at the 9th Review Conference in order to move on in the implementation of specific practical steps. The time remaining before the 9th Review Conference should be spent on consolidating national positions to ensure result-oriented work during the BWC Rev Con. In this context, the discussions held under this section have practical relevance. Regardless of certain differences that still remain in the interpretation of BWC Article X and difference in expectations as for the delivery and exchange of high end technologies all speakers acknowledged that it was possible to reach the happy mean that would ensure the consensus and onward movement. Let us hope that during the BWC States Parties session in November this year it will be possible to determine the ways of improving international cooperation under BWC Article X.

Panel 3. Moderator's summary

Science and technology review and its possible mechanisms under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

The panel focused on relevant science and technology developments and their possible review mechanisms under the BWC. It was moderated by Vladimir Ladanov, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Russia, who prepared this summary reflecting his personal account of the discussion.

There were five presenters in the panel including in person and video conference contributions.

Dr. James Revill, Programme Lead, Weapons of Mass Destruction and Other Strategic Weapons, UNIDIR (Switzerland), drew attention to both emerging risks and benefits in bio- and related research and development. He dwelt upon a recently released report by UNIDIR on options for establishing an institutional BWC science and technology review mechanism.

Dr. Dmitry Poklonsky, Head, Scientific Research Centre, 48th Central Scientific Research Institute, Ministry of Defence of Russia, spoke to the methodological approaches to assessing relevance of science and technology developments to the object and purpose of the BWC. He provided illustrative examples of emerging technologies in bio- and related fields that have a well defined dual use profile.

Professor Malcolm Dando, Bradford University (United Kingdom), referred to the development and implementation of an educational project for scientists aiming to raise their awareness of the BWC. Educational material was prepared in an easy-to-use form, translated into several languages and made freely available on the Internet. Dr. Anastasia Malygina, Assistant Professor, Saint Petersburg State University (Russia), added to the presentation by speaking about her involvement in that project.

Ms. Kathryn Millet, Biosecure, shared information on an educational Internet course for young scientists to raise their awareness of the BWC. Its contents were regularly updated including to take account of the COVID-19 introduced issues. Separately she spoke to the emerging challenge of cyberbiosecurity at the intersection of life sciences and information technology. Examples of related risks include possibilities of remotely sabotaging biotechnological sites such as vaccine manufacturing facilities, deleterious interference with containment assurance systems at microbiological laboratories, and manipulating information in biological databases and patent databases.

Dr. Vladimir Kutyrev, Director, Russian National Anti-Plague Scientific Research Institute "Microbe", presented on the challenges in emerging dual-use research and development such as synthetic biology and paleogenomics. Technical breakthroughs made possible the re-animation of extinct and ancient pathogens including causative agents of the Spanish flu and pandemic plagues, the Plague of Justinian and the Black Death, as well as ancient viruses previously frozen in the permafrost. Applicable research expanded understanding of microorganisms' evolution but also entailed risks of accidental or deliberate release of such re-animated agents.

Summing up, the moderator noted that the panel discussion was rich and productive enabling a better understanding of many pressing issues facing the States Parties to the BWC. Some contributors remarked that appropriately accounting for the impact of science and technology developments upon the BWC regime was essential for the Convention's effective implementation. In that context calls were made to ensure institutional strengthening of the BWC at its Ninth Review Conference by establishing relevant mechanisms such as the Scientific Advisory Committee proposed by Russia.

Panel 4. Moderator's summary

BWC institutional strengthening and IX Review Conference possible outcomes

Panel 4 was dedicated to discussing the institutional strengthening of the BWC and the possible outcomes of the upcoming 9th BWC Review Conference (RC).

The outcome of the Panel's work can be summarized as follows.

1. The participants underlined the need to take measures in order to ensure the effective fulfillment of BWC commitments and adapt the Convention to modern realities. It was stressed that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic prove the relevance of such efforts.
2. It was concluded that the political will of States Parties to look for compromises and mutually acceptable solutions in order to strengthen the Convention regime is the determining factor in this context.
3. It was stated that the vast majority of States Parties to the Convention support the adoption of a legally binding protocol to the BWC with an effective verification mechanism in order to make the Convention more efficient. In this context, it was noted that the lack of consensus among States Parties regarding the development of such an instrument is the major obstacle to the institutional strengthening of the BWC.
4. Interest was expressed in giving a comprehensive dimension to the efforts to strengthen the BWC so that such efforts could focus on the implementation of all of the Convention provisions.
5. At the same time, the participants noted the possibility to review separate initiatives aimed at the strengthening the BWC that are supported by States Parties to the Convention, including in order to lay the groundwork for potential negotiations on a legally binding protocol. However, it was noted that such efforts will not substitute the development of a legally binding protocol.
6. The examination of several promising topics under the intersessional work programme could contribute to strengthening the BWC. These topics are:
 - confidence-building measures;
 - national implementation;
 - monitoring of scientific and technological advances (including the establishment of a scientific advisory committee to examine technological advances related to the Convention and prepare relevant recommendations for States Parties, as well as develop a code of conduct for biologists);
 - international cooperation for peaceful purposes;
 - preparedness, assistance, and protection from biological weapons;
 - investigation of alleged use of biological weapons.

It was noted that in order to optimize efforts for institutional strengthening of the BWC it is necessary to take into account the groundwork done at all experts meetings.

7. It was underlined that it is necessary to ensure the financial and administrative stability in the context of BWC operation. It was particularly stressed that it is important to improve the funding and staffing of BWC ISU for the Unit to have appropriate capabilities to facilitate the implementation of the BWC.

8. It was underscored that it is important to use the Rev Con to update BWC provisions and bring the Convention in line with existing realities. In order to find meaningful solutions at the RC, the participants urged to take into account the experience of the previous Rev Con, as well as procedural and organizational peculiarities of the preparation for the Conference. The negative impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the preparation for the RC due to difficulties caused by COVID-19 regarding face-to-face meetings under the BWC was noted.
 9. The participants also emphasized the need to continue the dialogue between States Parties to find compromise solutions that would constitute the substantive basis of the Final Document of the 9th BWC Review Conference.
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