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**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**

4 December 2017

English only

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**2017 Meeting**  
**Geneva, 4-8 December 2017**  
Item 6 of the provisional agenda  
**Issues of substance and process for the period**  
**before the next Review Conference, with a view**  
**to reaching consensus on an intersessional process**

**Strengthening cooperation with international organizations**

**Submitted by Australia, Japan, the Netherlands and the United  
Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

**I. Introduction**

1. Since its entry into force, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and their Destruction (hereinafter “BWC”) has played a significant role in the elimination of biological and toxin weapons while also working as an effective deterrent. Although the BWC is effective, its effectiveness could be further strengthened when combined with other frameworks and measures.

2. This working paper recommends strengthening collaboration between the BWC and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in support of States Parties which are exposed to emergency as a result of possible violation of the Convention.

**II. The need for collaboration**

3. In such a case as sudden spread of infectious disease, it is hard to determine at the initial stage whether the event has occurred naturally, accidentally or has been caused intentionally.

4. Typically, experts in relevant fields such as doctors and epidemiologists would be dispatched to detect and identify pathogens, provide medical treatment and identify the source of infection. As the outcome of use of biological weapons could cause a major public health emergency, it is important that experts in relevant fields are aware of up-to-

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date information and trends related to biological threats in addition to ordinary public, animal, or plant health issues.

5. At the Seventh Review Conference in 2011, States Parties recognized that health and security issues are interrelated at both the national and international levels. The Conference highlighted the importance of pursuing initiatives in this area through effective cooperation and sustainable partnerships. The Conference noted the importance of ensuring that efforts undertaken are effective irrespective of whether a disease outbreak is naturally occurring or deliberately caused.

6. During the Intersessional Period from 2012 to 2016 and at the Preparatory Committee meetings in 2016, several States Parties emphasized the importance of coordination with the WHO, OIE and FAO a factor also recognized at past Review Conferences.

### **III. Cooperation with WHO**

7. As the International Health Regulations (2005) states, the WHO is prepared to assist and respond to public health emergencies regardless of the cause whether it is a natural or a deliberate outbreak. In order to prepare for all hazards, WHO established an Emergency Response Framework (ERF) (second edition in 2017) to respond to all sorts of public health emergencies. Thus far the ERF has not been activated to respond to a deliberate outbreak of infectious disease or intoxication. However, this initiative opens a window for WHO to begin further and more robust collaboration with security communities.

### **IV. Cooperation with OIE**

8. The OIE organized a global conference on “Biological Threat Reduction” in June 2015 and again in November 2017, reconfirming the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders in order to respond to biological threats. Discussions focused on enhancing cooperation among relevant international organizations to take action to strengthen prevention, detection and response (capability) mechanisms for public health and animal disease regardless of the case whether it is intentionally, accidentally or naturally caused. It is notable that OIE’s Biological Threat Reduction Strategy, which was endorsed at its 2015 conference, stated that a response to an infectious disease outbreak is the same whether it is directed against natural infection, or deliberate or accidental release.

### **V. The role of ISU in Article VII activities**

9. At the Sixth Review Conference in 2006, the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was established and given a mandate which included, inter alia, providing administrative support to meetings, implementation, universalization of the Convention and handling the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).

10. This mandate was renewed at the Seventh Review Conference. In addition to the tasks given at the Sixth Review Conference, the ISU was requested to establish and administer a database for assistance requests and offers, and facilitate the associated exchange of information among States Parties, and support the implementation by the States Parties of the decisions and recommendations of the Seventh Review Conference.

11. In the last intersessional period between 2012-2015, the ISU has played an important role in keeping contact with relevant international organizations such as WHO, OIE, FAO, INTERPOL and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Meetings of Experts

(MX) and Meetings of States Parties (MSP) in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 included participation of WHO, OIE and FAO experts. In addition, the ISU has invited WHO to participate in BWC regional workshops.

12. There has clearly been increased communication with relevant international organizations given the ISU's enthusiastic efforts and regular communication efforts. These are important as States Parties can learn from the experiences of relevant international organizations, in particular their successes and failures in managing various emergencies and providing support to their Member States.

13. The effectiveness of the BWC could be further enhanced and strengthened by establishing more effective mechanism to facilitate coordination among States Parties, relevant international organizations in charge of countering outbreaks of human, animal or plant infectious disease.

## **VI. Proposal**

14. This working paper recommends that the States Parties consider the following in a future intersessional process, which we hope will be agreed at the MSP, in order to strengthen preparedness for biological threats:

(a) continue to invite experts from relevant international organizations such as WHO, OIE and FAO to participate in a future Science and Technology (S&T) review process and make recommendations to States Parties as to how better prevent the spread of biological agents and toxins, deal with dual-use issues (both knowledge and technologies) and respond effectively to sudden outbreaks posing public health emergencies. By doing so, States Parties and relevant international organizations will be better able to prevent and detect biological attacks as well as take the necessary countermeasures;

(b) create a mechanism to facilitate close communication between the BWC States Parties and relevant international organizations so that smooth and swift exchange of information is possible in the event of a public, animal or plant health emergency. So that in case of an outbreak all these parties are warned simultaneously to facilitate further steps;

(c) strengthen the mandate and capacity of the ISU to facilitate coordination and cooperation among States Parties and relevant international organizations to respond effectively to public health emergencies caused by violation of the Convention. Increased human resources should be provided for the ISU in consideration of recruitment of staff with a career background in such organizations;

(d) request the ISU to prepare a background document that can serve as a basis for setting out an effective mechanism for collaboration and coordination relevant to Article VII and distribute it before the next MSP; and

(e) establish a working group to examine effective Article VII procedures as part of a new intersessional programme.

15. We consider that the measures recommended above would significantly enhance the capability to countering outbreaks of human, animal or plant infectious disease, whether natural, accidental or deliberate and thereby achieve effectively the requirements of the BWC.