

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
Meeting of Experts
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Confidence Building Measures

Submitted by the United States of America

Background

The Seventh Review Conference (RevCon) decided that in 2012 and 2013, States Parties should explore ways to improve participation in the annual BWC Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). The CBMs were established in 1986 as a politically binding commitment (the language adopted by the Second RevCon was that the Conference “agrees that the States Parties *are to implement*”). Nevertheless, fewer than half of all BTWC States Parties submit CBMs. All available evidence suggests that far fewer States Parties actually make use of the CBMs by reviewing the submissions of other States Parties. Submissions intended to demonstrate transparency, alleviate doubts, and increase confidence cannot achieve these ends if they are not read. The question of how to increase participation, therefore, must be approached broadly: not only should States Parties consider how to increase submission of CBM reports, but also how to make the data they contain more readily accessible and how to encourage States Parties to make constructive use of them. Without these steps, submission of CBMs—even on a universal basis—will be a hollow, ceremonial accomplishment, and do little to achieve the goals for which the CBMs were created.

Promoting Greater Participation in BTWC CBMs

The United States aims to increase participation - in both the submission of CBMs and in the review and use of CBMs - in part by improving the utility and relevance of the data collected under the CBM process. The CBM submissions are one of the BTWC’s few tools to engage its members in information exchange that can provide a useful tool for discussions with neighbors and others in times of both cooperation and heightened tensions. Confidence building measures have been a critical component of global and regional efforts to bring peace and establish more transparency between opposing sides for decades. BTWC submissions can be used to promote a wide array of biosafety/biosecurity and regulatory measures. Cooperation and assistance are ever more crucial in a time of austerity, and more detailed review and discussion of submissions will provide avenues for collaboration. National submissions should not be seen as a burden (the U.S. submission is nearly 300 pages), but as a way to open the door to greater understanding of what others are doing and could potentially do together.

The Seventh RevCon took steps toward this goal by modestly revising the CBM reporting forms, urging the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to work with States Parties to further develop options for electronic submission, and renewing the request for National Points of Contact. We welcome the time set aside this year and next for detailed discussions. A key consideration for increasing participation in all aspects of the CBM process is to ensure that the questions asked by the CBMs are useful, relevant, and result in information that meets the needs of States Parties. The changes adopted by the Seventh RevCon focused mainly on streamlining the CBMs and on clarifying certain questions, leaving more fundamental revision to be considered at a later date.

A number of steps can be envisioned to improve participation, both in terms of submission of CBMs and in review of these reports. With respect to increasing submissions:

- First, the streamlining undertaken by the Seventh RevCon should reduce reporting burdens and increase participation. It will be important to monitor progress in this respect.
- Second, the BTWC Chairman should contact all States Parties that have not yet designated a National Point of Contact, as called for by the Sixth and Seventh RevCons, and ask them to do so by the time of the Meeting of States Parties in December.
- Third, the Chairman should, each year, write to those States Parties who have not submitted their reports for the previous year, noting that they have not reported, stressing that the ISU and various States Parties stand ready to provide assistance, and urging them to submit their CBMs without delay.
- Fourth, the ISU should continue and intensify its efforts to move to a fully electronic CBM system that will simplify both reporting and analysis.
- Fifth, a CBM assistance network, coordinated by the ISU, should be established. A number of States Parties have standing offers to assist with CBM reporting. These offers should, where necessary, be updated; the offers and contact information posted on the BTWC website; the CBM reporting guidelines published by various sources harmonized if possible; and greater use made of remote assistance (e.g., via phone and email).
- Sixth, States Parties should be encouraged to urge others that do not submit CBM reports to do so.

With respect to increasing use of CBMs:

- An improved electronic reporting process could make the data contained in CBMs much more accessible and useful than it is at present, thereby promoting use;
- To the extent that language is a barrier, translation may be an important factor. We welcome Canada's announcement at the Seventh RevCon that it intends to support some CBM translation, and are considering options to support this goal.
- Finally, the move toward publicly available CBM submissions in recent years has shown that public access allows civil society—in particular, academia—to play a constructive role in aggregating and analyzing CBM data. This may considerably facilitate analysis and engagement by those States Parties that lack the resources for this exercise, and should therefore be encouraged.

Recommendations

The 2012 Meeting of States Parties should:

1. Strongly urge all States Parties to acknowledge, and reiterate to others, the importance of participation in the CBM process.
2. Call on all States Parties to designate National CBM Points of Contact as agreed at the Sixth RevCon and reiterated at the Seventh RevCon, and request the Chairman to follow up with those States Parties who have not done so.
3. Call upon the BTWC Chairman to contact States Parties who have not submitted CBMs the previous year, note offers of assistance, and urge submission without delay.

4. Urge States Parties to assist the ISU with efforts to move to a fully electronic CBM system that will simplify both reporting and analysis and make the data more widely available.
5. Urge establishment of CBM assistance network, coordinated by the ISU, to provide expert advice in an accessible manner; update and harmonize CBM handbooks; and post this information on ISU website.
6. Urge States Parties in a position to do so to offer, and coordinate, assistance, training, translations, and workshops in support of national implementation tasks such as compiling and submitting CBMs.
7. Welcome the decision of many States Parties to post submissions on the publically available ISU website to facilitate aggregating and analyzing CBM data.