

The role of the Biological Weapons Convention in countering biological threats

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Convention on the Prohibition of
the Development, Production and
Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons
and on their Destruction

BWC facts and figures

- Opened for signature in 1972; entered into force in 1975
- Current membership:
 - 165 States Parties
 - 12 signatories
 - 19 states neither signed nor ratified
- Main provisions:
 - completely prohibits any acquisition or retention of biological or toxin weapons; no exceptions (Art. I)
 - prohibits assisting or encouraging others to acquire BW (Art. III)
 - requires national implementation measures (Art. IV)
 - peaceful uses of biological science and technology to be protected and encouraged (Art. X)



Direction of the BWC since 2002

- Focus on improving and coordinating national implementation
- Annual work programme deals with specific topics; exchange of technical expertise
- Range of different actors and organisations involved
- Implementation Support Unit coordinates activity



Why this direction?

- Bioterrorism becomes major concern after September 11, 2001
- Rapidly growing biotech capabilities, shrinking costs, and widely expanding interest, participation, availability and access
 - Unintended consequences, experiments gone wrong
 - Accidents, leaks, mistakes – or deliberate misuse or sabotage (bio-terror vs. bio-error)
 - Awareness and management of risks lagging far behind
- Concern about naturally-occurring, emerging and re-emerging disease
- Recognition of interconnection of BW with other biological risks

Spectrum of biological risks

Natural
disease
outbreak

Unintended
consequences

Accidents

Negligence

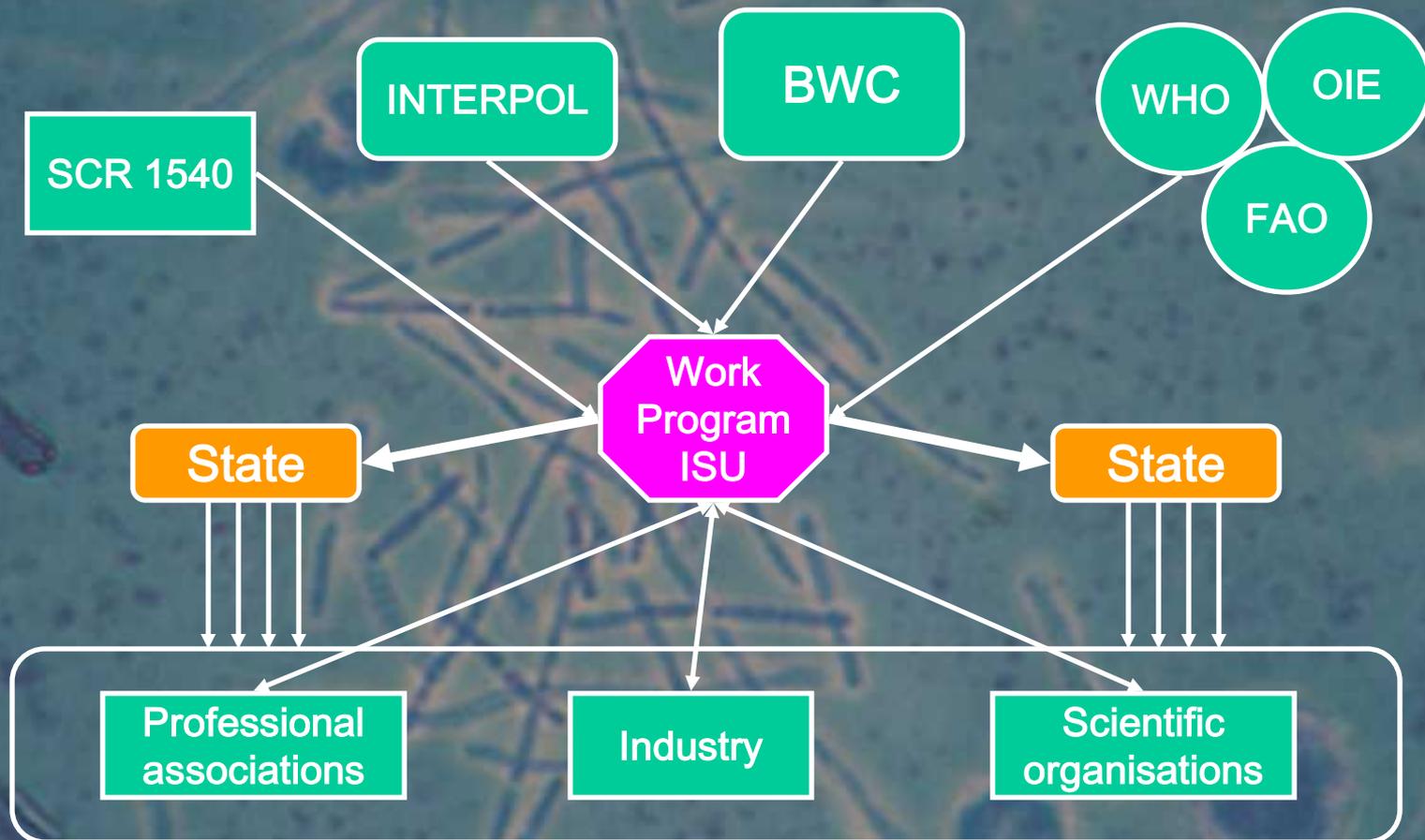
Vandalism,
sabotage

Deliberate
use of BW

WHO

BWC

BWC approach: a network model



A shared responsibility



“Governments alone cannot confront the risks posed by biological weapons ... to manage the full spectrum of biological risks, you need a cohesive, coordinated network of activities and resources. Such a network will help to ensure that biological science and technology can be safely and securely developed for the benefit of all.”

- Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2008

Seventh Review Conference: outcomes

- Final Declaration, including guidance on implementation
- New, re-structured intersessional programme (2012-2015):
 - Three “standing agenda items”
 - also considers CBMs (2012-13) and Article VII (2014-15)
 - vice-chairs
- Revised CBM forms
- Database for assistance requests and offers
- Sponsorship programme
- ISU mandate renewed until 2016



Final Declaration – Article IV

Notes the value of national implementation measures to:

- implement voluntary management standards on biosafety and biosecurity
- promote amongst those working in the biological sciences awareness of the obligations of States Parties under the Convention, as well as relevant national legislation and guidelines
- promote the development of training and education programmes for those granted access to biological agents and toxins relevant to the Convention and for those with the knowledge or capacity to modify such agents and toxins
- encourage the promotion of a culture of responsibility amongst relevant national professionals and the voluntary development, adoption and promulgation of codes of conduct
- strengthen methods and capacities for surveillance and detection of outbreaks of disease at the national, regional and international levels, noting that the International Health Regulations (2005) are important for building capacity to prevent, protect against, control and respond to the international spread of disease

Final Declaration – Article X

“Recognizing the fundamental importance of enhancing international cooperation, assistance and exchange in biological sciences and technology for peaceful purposes, the Conference agrees on the value of working together to promote capacity building in the fields of vaccine and drug production, disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment of infectious diseases as well as biological risk management. The Conference affirms that building such capacity would directly support the achievement of the objectives of the Convention.”

New intersessional programme

- Mandate remains to “discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on” specific topics related to better implementation of the BWC
- Runs from 2012 to 2015 (8th RevCon in 2016)
- Two meetings each year: Meeting of Experts mid-year (16-20 July 2012); Meeting of States Parties in December (10-14 December 2012)
- Wide range of participants: objective is sharing information and experience, identifying best practices, improving effectiveness of the BWC

New intersessional programme

- Three standing agenda items (considered every year):
 - Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X
 - Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention
 - Strengthening national implementation
- Other topics:
 - How to enable fuller participation in the CBMs (2012 and 2013)
 - How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties (2014 and 2015)
 - Universalization, ISU report (every year)

Aspects relevant to health security (1)

- SAI-1: education, training, exchange and twinning programs and other means of developing human resources in the biological sciences and technology relevant to BWC implementation;
- SAI-1: capacity-building in biosafety and biosecurity, and for detecting, reporting, and responding to outbreaks of infectious disease or biological weapons attacks, including in the areas of preparedness, response, and crisis management and mitigation

Aspects relevant to health security (2)

- SAI-2: possible measures for strengthening national biological risk management, as appropriate, in research and development involving new science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention
- SAI-2: voluntary codes of conduct and other measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists, academia and industry;
- SAI-2: education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology

Aspects relevant to health security (3)

- SAI-3: a range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of the Convention, especially Articles III and IV
- SAI-3: sharing best practices and experiences on national implementation, enforcement of national legislation, strengthening of national institutions and coordination among national law enforcement institutions
- SAI-3: national, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens and toxins

Implementation Support Unit (ISU)

- Small, 3-person unit in UNODA, funded entirely by BWC States Parties
- Mandate:
 - “Help States Parties help themselves”
 - Provide administrative support for BWC meetings
 - Facilitate communication among States Parties and with relevant organizations
 - Support national implementation efforts
 - Act as “clearing house” for offers of and requests for assistance, administer database
 - Administer confidence-building measures (CBMs)
 - Support universalization activities
 - Support implementation of decisions and recommendations of 6th and 7th Review Conference



For more information...

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