

The Biological Weapons Convention Supporting Global Health: Reducing Biological Risks by Building Capacity in Health Security

Co-chairs' Summary

An international workshop on the Biological Weapons Convention Supporting Global Health: Reducing Biological Risks by Building Capacity in Health Security was held in Oslo on 18-19 June 2009. The workshop was co-hosted by Indonesia, Norway, and the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit (ISU). The workshop built on the experiences from the Regional Seminar on Promoting and Implementing Biosafety and Biosecurity Management held in Jakarta on 4-5 June 2008.

The workshop was also intended to make a contribution to ongoing efforts to further strengthen national implementation of the BWC, as well as supporting the Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative calling for greater awareness of the many links between foreign policy and global health issues.

More than 70 representatives from 25 countries took part in the workshop, which was opened by Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre. Substantive contributions were made by the World Health Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the BWC ISU, the European Union, national experts and the private sector.

There were rich discussions on global challenges in human, animal and plant health, and how the BWC could support national, regional and international actions in these areas. Participants exchanged experiences from a variety of national perspectives and circumstances, with a view to identifying challenges and opportunities for greater cooperation and coordination in the health, security and arms control fields, and exploring prospects for further capacity-building activities that support both public health and security goals. In particular, participants discussed ways in which these goals might be pursued through practical steps to implement Article X of the BWC.

The workshop did not negotiate any outcome document, but the conveners of the event made the following observations:

- Participants recognised that health is deeply interconnected with the environment, trade, economic growth, social development, national security and human rights and dignity.
- Participants underlined the importance of the full and effective implementation of all the provisions the BWC, noting that this could make significant contribution in meeting health and development objectives.

- Participants affirmed that the importance Article X and transparency in achieving specific public health and security objectives and in meeting UN Millennium Development Goals.
- While taking into account different perspectives on how to implement Article X, participants underlined the need to develop a common approach in addressing this article in relation to other provisions of the BWC, in particular Articles I and III.
- It was further noted that strengthening biosafety and biosecurity, education and awareness-raising, as part of comprehensive implementation of the BWC at national level, would greatly facilitate the full realisation of Article X.
- Participants discussed a range of possible national and international approaches to strengthening the implementation of the BWC. Some raised the possibility of negotiating a legally-binding instrument to strengthen the BWC; others advocated a focus on cooperative national and international action to enhance networks and build capacity.
- It was stressed that a well-functioning national health system would constitute the best defence in the case of intentional spread of diseases, and would ensure that scarce resources are used more effectively, including through an “all hazard approach”.
- Participants recognised the importance of the revised WHO International Health Regulations (IHR) for effectively addressing current and emerging health security challenges.
- Full implementation of the IHR requires mobilisation of national and international resources for capacity building to meet the national capacity requirements in the given IHR timeframe. Article 5 and Annex 1 of the IHR provide the requirements for national capacity which could be supported in the context of Article X of the BWC.
- It was further noted that the IHR contains obligations with respect to cooperation and provision of assistance and that IHR implementation requires the involvement of many sectors other than the health sector, including the security sector.
- Animal and plant health are considered as important global public goods, and essential for food safety and security. It was stressed that recent experience has demonstrated that human health cannot be considered in isolation from animal and plant health.

- Concern was expressed on insufficient mobilisation of resources for animal and plant health. Donor countries were encouraged to provide more long-term, sustainable and predictable funding. Initiatives and capacity building programmes carried out by the FAO and the OIE were greatly appreciated.
 - Participants called for further strengthening existing international organizations and networks working on infectious diseases, in particular those of the WHO, FAO, OIE and IPPC, within their respective mandates.
 - Participants recognised that strengthening health security required sustained and long-term investment in human resources, infrastructure, and standard operating procedures, adapted to local needs and circumstances.
 - It was noted that early investment to build capacity and preparedness was much more cost-effective than responding to events as they occurred.
 - Participants urged an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to funding, in view of the need to pool resources from the different national and international agencies working in public health, agriculture, law-enforcement and security.
 - Participants underlined the need for partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and recognised the important role that could be played by the private sector, academia and NGOs in building capacity for health security.
 - Participants welcomed the contributions currently being made by the private sector, academia and NGOs in the areas of research on diagnosis and treatment of infectious disease, providing access to medicines, and working with local communities to strengthen their healthcare capabilities.
 - Continued cooperation, dialogue and constructive engagement among all relevant actors will be required to effectively manage the complex issues surrounding sharing of viruses and production and access to vaccines, in the interest of building national health capacities worldwide.
 - Standards in relation to BWC implementation, such as safety, security and control, may contribute in enhancing confidence, while taking into account respective national legislation.
 - Participants recognised the need for strengthened cooperation between developed and developing countries; there were also important opportunities for increased cooperation among developing countries.
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