

**IWG-LNCV Biological Workshop and Roundtable
Fostering the Biosecurity Norm: An Educational Module for Life Sciences Students**

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Education and Awareness Raising in the 2008 Meetings of the BWC

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to have been asked to address you today. First, let me take this opportunity to thank the International Working Group and the University of Bradford for arranging this workshop. The topic being discussed today is highly pertinent: biological science and technology continues to advance at an increasingly rapid rate and therefore, there is mounting pressure on the international community to develop a safety framework in which these technologies can be applied.

The Sixth Review Conference in 2006 formally recognized the role education and awareness-raising has to play in effective implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention. The Conference urged States Parties to include information on the Convention in medical, scientific and military educational materials and programmes, and to "promote the development of training and education programmes for those granted access to biological agents and toxins relevant to the Convention in order to raise awareness of the risks, as well as of the obligations of States Parties under the Convention". The Conference also encouraged States Parties to promote awareness among relevant professionals of the need to report activities that could constitute a violation of the Convention or related national criminal law, and to support and encourage the development, promulgation and adoption of codes of conduct and other self-regulatory mechanisms.

The Conference further recognised the importance of education and awareness-raising by specifically devoting part of the 2007-2010 intersessional process to it. As you know, the States Parties to the BWC are working hard, through their intersessional programme, to meet the challenges of strengthening the implementation of the Convention in the face of an evolving biological weapons threat. The topics covered by this year's BWC meetings are:

1. National, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins; and
2. Oversight, education, awareness raising, and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention.

These two topics are interconnected to a significant degree, but today I want to focus on the second topic, especially the education and awareness-raising part; to report to you on the discussions that took place at the BWC Meeting of Experts in August; and to outline our expectations for the Meeting of States Parties in December. I would also like to speak about the activities of the BWC Implementation Support Unit on education and awareness-raising.

The Meeting of Experts, which was held in Geneva from 18-22 August, was notable for the level of participation of experts, not just from national delegations of States Parties, but from international organizations, scientific and professional bodies, academia and civil society. In all, just under 500 delegates participated, and around 180 of these could be classed as technical experts of one kind or another. I was very pleased at the range of representation for relevant scientific professionals, such as the regional biosafety associations, several international scientific unions, and three private sector pharmaceutical and biotechnology corporations. And I am pleased to see many of you here today who participated in the Meeting of Experts. I was also happy that we were able to conduct the meeting entirely in open session, so that these representatives could participate fully in the discussions. Our new innovation of poster sessions for experts was very well-received and offered further opportunities for interaction and exchange.

The broad level of active participation ensured that we tackled the issue of education and awareness-raising with the involvement and engagement of the actors that this important issue most concerns. As Chairman, securing such involvement and engagement has been a key goal. As has been noted by many, the threats posed to global security by biological weapons cannot be successfully confronted by governments alone, no matter how many resources they apply to the problem. Rather, we need a collective, multifaceted and multidimensional approach. We need to engage scientists, educators, corporations and other relevant actors to develop a network of collaboration and coordination that weaves international, regional and domestic strands into a flexible and resilient fabric of oversight and prevention.

With this in mind, I would like to summarize some of the key points that emerged in the course of the very detailed discussions we had at the Meeting of Experts. I have spent the last few weeks working with the Implementation Support Unit to go through the wealth of material produced at the meeting, to organize and distill it into a synthesis paper for consideration at the Meeting of States Parties in December. This synthesis paper was released earlier this month, and is available from the ISU website at www.unog.ch/bwc. I hope you find it a useful resource, both for planning your participation in the Meeting of States Parties, and in general in addressing the topic of today's workshop.

One clear theme that ran through both topics of the Meeting of Experts was that of **balance**: we heard repeatedly of the need for proportional measures, for carefully assessing risks, for balancing security concerns against the need for nurturing research and ensuring the peaceful development of biological science and technology. Another central theme was "no one size fits all": no matter whether we are talking about standards for biosafety and biosecurity, educational programmes, or codes of conduct, it is clear that States Parties and other actors recognize that individual and local circumstances must be taken into account when addressing these issues.

More specifically, on the topic of oversight, education and awareness-raising, many participants recognized the overarching need to ensure that scientists and other relevant stakeholders are aware of their obligations under the Convention and the content of relevant national legislation and guidelines. They also need to understand how these obligations are related to their activities, and this means ensuring they have a clear understanding of the content, purpose and foreseeable consequences of their activities, and have the skills and expertise needed to judge the wider ramifications of their research. There was also broad recognition at the meeting of the need for stakeholders to take a more active role in

addressing the threats posed by biological weapons, including by taking the lead in debating the implications of research with relevant civil society groups, social scientists, ethicists and the public.

We heard from several quarters that the ultimate aim of education and raising awareness was to develop a culture of responsibility among stakeholder communities, thereby ensuring the free flow of information and resources for peaceful and permitted purposes. From the various presentations made by national delegations, I think it is fair to say that States Parties fully recognize that education and awareness-raising activities are an important and integral part of their efforts to implement the Convention. Many States Parties also noted that greater international cooperation could improve the availability of resources, and that exchanging relevant information and experiences would assist in education and awareness-raising. Conversely, delegations recognized that education and raising awareness form a core element of capacity-building, assistance and cooperation in efforts to facilitate the peaceful uses of biological science and technology.

Other ideas and considerations on education and awareness-raising put forward at the Meeting of Experts can be grouped into three categories: scope of activity, content of activity, and tools for application. On the first category, scope, we heard arguments in favour of:

- Government taking a key role, including through engagement with parliamentarians;
- Ensuring stakeholders are aware of the possible adverse social, environmental, health and security consequences of their work;
- Development and implementation taking place in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders;
- Covering all relevant stakeholders from both public and private institutions as well as managers and administrators of universities, research institutions and private companies;
- Making use of formal requirements in relevant scientific and engineering training programmes, such as mandatory seminars, modules or courses;
- Encouraging stakeholder-led activities, such as the development, adoption and promulgation of codes of conduct;
- Integrating ongoing activities throughout relevant secondary and tertiary education (as opposed to restricting them to a single component);
- Making education and awareness-raising part of continuing professional education, thereby ensuring it is an ongoing process throughout a career in the biological sciences; and
- Coordinating outreach activities on the Convention with parallel initiatives in other settings, such as those undertaken on biosafety and biosecurity by the World Health Organization, efforts by the UN 1540 Committee, etc.

On the **content** of education and awareness raising activities, various delegations noted the value of:

- Covering the moral and ethical obligations incumbent on those using the biological sciences;
- Encompassing relevant national and international laws and regulations, including on the export / import of relevant biological resources;
- Including information on policies and principles aimed at preventing the malign use of biological research;
- Explaining the risks associated with the malign use of the biological sciences and biotechnology;
- Providing guidance on the types of activities which could be contrary to the aims of the Convention;
- Including best practices for biosafety, biosecurity and the management of information; and
- Tailoring the content of relevant activities to the target audiences – not all stakeholders need to receive the same message.

Among the **tools** that might be used to carry out education and awareness-raising, the following were suggested:

- Making use of, and providing the resources for, seminars, workshops, publications, audiovisual materials, and codes of conduct;
- Developing targeted outreach strategies for senior scientists with responsibility for oversight of research or for evaluation of projects or publications;
- Targeting academic institutions and associations, regulators, private and commercial institutions, as well as individual scientists;
- Developing frameworks that make education and raising awareness feasible over the longer term and, if possible, self-sustaining;
- Creating accessible teaching materials which address the Convention and dual-use issues;
- Using interactive and experience-generating mechanisms to the largest extent possible, as opposed to traditional lecture settings; and
- Ensuring the availability of properly trained individuals to conduct such activities – train-the-trainer programmes might offer one way of ensuring such capacity exists.

These ideas and proposals, which are encompassed in somewhat abbreviated form in the synthesis paper, will be considered further by the Meeting of States Parties, to be held in Geneva from 1 to 5 December. I hope that many of you will be able to join us at that meeting, to share the results of this workshop, and to help States Parties decide on specific measures they might take in the area of education and awareness-raising. Since it will be a meeting of

States Parties, rather than of experts, I cannot promise that the proceedings will be as open as they were in August. Nevertheless, I am confident that all States Parties recognise the importance of engaging with scientists, academia and industry on this issue, and of appropriately incorporating your valuable efforts.

I would also like to take this opportunity to speak about the activities of the Implementation Support Unit in the area of education and awareness-raising. The establishment of the ISU was one of the most significant outcomes of the Sixth Review Conference, addressing a long-standing need for institutional support for the implementation of the Convention. At last the BWC has an institutional focus – a central point of communication and interaction – and this is already making a significant difference in building awareness of the BWC and the activities of the States Parties.

As well as generally supporting the comprehensive implementation and universalization of the Convention, the ISU is formally mandated to facilitate communication among States Parties and with international organizations, and to facilitate States Parties' contacts with scientific and academic institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. In pursuing this, the ISU has undertaken a wide range of activities that have contributed to raising awareness of the Convention and its implementation. The ISU's website, for example, has become the authoritative "one-stop shop" for information on the BWC and related activities, and is widely used by States Parties, international organizations, scientific and professional bodies, and civil society.

The ISU has also been participating in – and often helping to organise – a range of policy, scientific and academic meetings, seminars and workshops in many countries around the world. These often provide a valuable opportunity for direct contact with key stakeholders, and are a highly effective means of raising awareness and building the community of those with an active interest in strengthening the implementation of the Convention. This year, for example, the ISU has briefed the annual meeting of the European Biosafety Association and the recent Synthetic Biology 4.0 conference in Hong Kong, as well as participated in biosecurity workshops in Budapest, Jakarta and Amman.

I encourage you to make use of the effective and flexible resource the ISU represents. Whether through assisting with the organization of a workshop, or helping with the dissemination among States Parties of a proposed educational module, or finding suitable partners to take your work forward, the ISU is ready to work with you in accordance with its mandate of facilitating contacts with States Parties and supporting the comprehensive implementation of the Convention.

Let me conclude these remarks by thanking you, on behalf of the BWC States Parties, for your interest, commitment and hard work in addressing the threat that confronts us all, and which we must tackle jointly. This workshop is an important step in developing practical measures on education and awareness-raising, and once more I encourage you to report fully to the Meeting of States Parties on your work here. I am looking forward to an interesting and practically-focused discussion, and I wish you the best for a successful workshop.

Thank you.
