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

2018 Meeting
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Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda
Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations, including possible outcomes
Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X

Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X: Reflections and proposals for possible outcomes

Submitted by the Chair of the Meeting of Experts on Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X

1. At the request of the Chairperson of the 2018 Meeting of States Parties to the BWC, I am submitting this document in my individual capacity as Chair of MX1, to assist the MSP in developing consensus outcomes based on the discussions in August. It also seeks to draw attention to topics and proposals taken up in MX1 that merit further discussion by the States Parties during the Inter-Sessional Process, for their consideration in the Ninth Review Conference in 2021 of agreements to take forward common understanding and effective action on implementing the Convention.

2. MX1 reviewed the comprehensive activities being undertaken by States Parties to implement Article X. It emphasized the usefulness of reports in affirming the States Parties commitment to implement Article X, mapping the web of partnerships for cooperation and assistance under Article X, and monitoring the broad range of current activities and taking them forward. It underlined that reports from states receiving assistance are instructive in terms of monitoring the success of cooperation projects and these States’ enhanced capacities to engage in further cooperation activities, including with other developing states through South-South cooperation. In this regard, the Meeting called for regular reporting from States Parties on Article X implementation and the consideration of possible guidelines to harmonize reporting.

3. MX1 explored ways to promote more robust cooperation and assistance under Article X through programmatic, harmonized and sustainable approaches, including for the purpose of assessing needs and gaps within the BWC context. States Parties emphasized that needs and gaps assessment activities are fundamental steps to identifying cooperation and assistance projects, enabling more developing states to participate successfully in the Cooperation database and cooperation and assistance activities in general, and mobilizing resources.
4. States Parties highlighted the role of the Cooperation Database in promoting cooperation and assistance under Article X, and in consolidating and coordinating the broad range of Article X activities being undertaken by States Parties. While taking note of recent improvements to the Database, they discussed the need to further optimize its operationalization, promote its visibility and enhance its features as a user-friendly, resource-rich and functional online cooperation platform. The structure of the Cooperation Database can be improved to cover the continuum of (a) identifying needs and gaps, (b) mobilizing resources, (c) linking the various actors and institutions providing assistance relevant to Article X, including academe and institutes, at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, and, (d) monitoring of outcomes.

5. MX1 discussed the need for new approaches and instruments to effectively address gaps and needs in cooperation and assistance under Article X in a sustainable manner, through resource mobilization guidelines. Such guidelines can consider examples in the UN system of public-private partnerships that have succeeded in bringing together international organizations, NGOs, academe and industry, including in building capacities in public health and facilitating technology transfers. It was emphasized that clearly identified needs and gaps would guide the development of resource mobilization strategies suitable to the BWC context.

6. MX1 discussed challenges in bridging gaps in the fields of biotechnology, genetic engineering, microbiology and other related areas between developed and developing states, taking note that narrowing such gaps within the context of Article X cooperation will be a step forward in heeding the call of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a new disarmament agenda, that among others, supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. The Meeting discussed hurdles to the task of narrowing this gap and possible measures to address them.

7. MX1 noted that national implementation plans are highly-useful tools in identifying gaps and needs at the national level and specific opportunities for assistance and cooperation. Comprehensive inter-agency plans at the national level can contribute to effective implementation and help in identifying concrete opportunities for developed states to support human resource development in the fields of biological sciences and technology in developing states and to facilitate technology transfers. It was pointed out that oversight of scientific research, education about dual-use risks, ethical science and bioethics, the development of codes of conduct for life scientists and legislation and regulations on biosafety and biosecurity are important elements in national plans.

8. MX1 noted that for States Parties providing assistance, voluntary transparency exercises, such as peer review exercises, are highly useful for monitoring, assessing and mapping cooperation and assistance projects under Article X, as well as for the purposes of training and identifying assistance opportunities.

9. MX1 emphasized the need for measures to reinforce the web of existing global, regional and sub-regional platforms and networks for education, training, exchange and twinning programs to support human resource development in the field of biological sciences and biotechnology in the developing world and to enhance developing states’ capacities to access and optimize technologies of peaceful uses of biological toxins and agents.

10. Concrete measures proposed during MX1 to address capacity gaps in developing states which merit further elaboration, in terms of their implementation within the BWC context, include the following: a database to serve as reference on regulatory frameworks for biosafety and biosecurity; effective training provision and manuals that will help States Parties in crafting tailored biological risk management systems as well as in establishing, operating and maintaining laboratories for high-consequence pathogens.

11. MX1 considered the broad range of existing activities and opportunities for strengthening collaboration with international organizations such as the WHO, INTERPOL, and the OIE, and relevant networks, on areas relevant to the Convention. States Parties emphasized the need to continue to have focused discussions on particular points of synergy between the mandates of these organizations and networks and that of the BWC,
taking into account the distinct role of the BWC as a Convention dealing with security issues.

12. In preparation for the Ninth Review Conference in 2021, the succeeding MX1 may further discuss the above-stated topics and proposals, as well as the following, to consider these ideas in an in-depth manner and with the view to achieving consensus:

(a) Guidelines for Article X reports;

(b) Creation of a position of a BWC Cooperation and Assistance Officer within the BWC-ISU;

(c) A Cooperation Committee, an open-ended working group, to monitor, coordinate and review activities of cooperation and assistance;

(d) A non-proliferation export control and cooperation regime that will promote non-proliferation and peaceful use of biotechnology;

(e) Action Plan for Article X implementation;

(f) Guidelines for sustainable resource mobilization strategies;

(g) Support for global, regional and sub-regional academic networks in promoting human resource capacities in the developing world in the biological sciences;

(h) Collaboration with OIE on the guidelines on investigation of suspicious biological events, particularly on mapping of laboratory capabilities across public health, veterinary and forensic disciplines, training and education, and enhancing institutional capacities at the national regional and global levels;

(i) Collaboration with INTERPOL on its initiatives to address biological threats and mechanisms for information-sharing and support for national law enforcement authorities during investigations and emergency response; and

(j) Enhanced coordination with WHO, other international organisations and networks at regional and sub-regional levels, to combat infectious diseases.