



IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK FOR THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

*7 August 2015, 0900-1500
Room VIII, Palais des Nations
Geneva, Switzerland*

**Hosted by the BWC Implementation Support Unit and
the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research**

OVERVIEW

BWC States Parties and other interested Governments and organizations are invited to participate in an informal meeting to discuss the international response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and to assess the extent to which lessons learned would apply in the event of a deliberate use of disease as a weapon. Participation from entities directly involved in all aspects of the response effort is particularly encouraged. The central aim of the meeting will be to identify what would be different in the case of a deliberate event:

- How would the organizations and entities that the international community has relied upon to stop Ebola in West Africa respond to a deliberate biological event?
- How would these organizational responses affect BWC States Parties' decisions and planning regarding implementation of Article VII?

BACKGROUND

Response to Ebola in West Africa has necessitated sustained contributions from national Governments, intergovernmental organizations, international organizations, charitable organizations, foundations, and individual donors, straining global public health emergency response capacity and fundamentally challenging preconceptions about international assistance following a public health emergency. As the international community begins to derive lessons learned from this experience, States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) stand to benefit from understanding the ways in which these lessons might apply to global response following an intentional biological event.

Throughout the intersessional process, BWC States Parties have considered the roles of international organizations that may be involved in the provision and coordination of assistance relevant to Article VII of the Convention. In particular, in both 2014 and 2015, States Parties are to consider how to strengthen the implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.

Many of the challenges encountered in providing assistance and most of the capacities necessary to respond to an intentional outbreak are the same as those required to respond to a natural infectious disease outbreak, such as Ebola in West Africa.

It is unclear, however, how the response from international organizations and NGOs – or even national Governments – might be affected by a determination that a disease outbreak was intentional. Such a determination could have implications in terms of organizations' mandates, applicable international law, the ability to deploy personnel, and other factors, and might well preclude some actors from engaging in the response effort at all. Therefore, it is unclear what resources, from attribution to humanitarian response, would be available to respond to an intentional event.

AUGUST MEETING

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of State have conducted interviews with representatives of numerous international organizations and NGOs to assess how their response to Ebola in West Africa might have changed if evidence emerged of a deliberate outbreak. These interviews have yielded a number of insights into the ways in which various organizations would be challenged to participate in a response to a deliberate event. These include issues relating to coordination, command and control, personnel security, and the role of the security sector (e.g., in law enforcement investigations, protection of emergency responders, and maintenance of public law and order).

These insights will be presented for discussion at the meeting in Geneva on 7 August 2015, the Friday before the BWC Meeting of Experts. The primary purpose of this meeting, hosted by the ISU and UNIDIR and supported by the Government of the United States, is for States Parties to share their experiences in the Ebola response and identify ways in which their national response might have been altered if there had been a deliberate component to the West Africa outbreak. It is also hoped to elicit insights from the affected countries and from key international organizations and NGOs.

There will be several break-out sessions during the meeting, including groups to discuss:

- The role of military resources
- Command and control
- Interactions with NGOs and international organizations
- Safety and security of medical personnel
- Interaction between humanitarian response efforts and attribution assessments

States Parties, particularly those that have supported the Ebola response in West Africa, are invited to participate in the 7 August meeting and share perspectives on how their national efforts might have been affected if the response was to a deliberate event.

A short summary of the meeting will be produced, distilling key points on a non-attribution basis, for circulation during the 2015 Meeting of Experts.

RSVP

In order to facilitate administrative arrangements, please respond to Anita Bletry at UNIDIR on abletry@unog.ch or 022 917 4263 by 1 August . In responding, please indicate in which breakout sessions you wish to participate.