
**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**

12 August 2010

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2010 Meeting

Geneva, 6–10 December 2010

Meeting of Experts

Geneva, 23–27 August 2010

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of the provision of assistance and
coordination with relevant organizations upon
request by any State Party in the case of alleged
use of biological or toxin weapons, including
improving national capabilities for disease surveillance,
detection and diagnosis and public health systems.**

**Southern Caucasus collaboration and partnership in
countering biological threats**

Submitted by Georgia and the United States of America

I. Introduction

1. The Southern Caucasus Workshop on "Public Health, Security, and Law Enforcement Partnership in Bio-Incident Pre-Planning and Response" and the associated "Southern Caucasus BioShield 2010" Tabletop Exercise were held in Tbilisi, Georgia, 11-12 May 2010. These events were a joint effort of the US Department of Defense (DOD), Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA); US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (HHS/ASPR); and Georgia's Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC).

2. About 80 participants were in attendance, from inter-governmental organizations (WHO, INTERPOL, NATO), US Government (DOD, HHS, Department of Energy, Department of State, and FBI), and from public health, security, or law enforcement organizations from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova and Romania. Non-governmental organizations such as VERTIC (Verification Research, Training and Information Centre), Bechtel, and Global Green USA also participated in these events.

3. The workshop and tabletop exercise aimed to:

- (a) Foster improved understanding of the respective procedures and requirements of public health, security, and law enforcement communities in response to a

biological incident, and enhance their joint effectiveness in pre-planning and response at the national and regional/international level;

(b) Enhance understanding of intergovernmental organizations' role and their interaction in the process of sharing information and coordinating the international response;

(c) Emphasize the concept that information exchange in the early stages of a biological incident is critical to effectively containing the outbreak/mitigating the consequences of a biological incident and to apprehending the potential perpetrators;

(d) Review existing legal and regulatory infrastructure of national measures consistent with the obligations under the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (UNSCR 1540), and WHO International Health Regulations (IHRs) to deter, prevent, or respond to biological incidents or threats.

4. The workshop was organized as a series of plenary presentations ("academics") focused on the multi-layers of public health security defense (with perspectives offered by inter-governmental organizations and national representatives of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) followed by a tabletop exercise focused on bioterrorism prevention, deterrence, and response.

II. Southern Caucasus BioShield 2010 Tabletop Exercise

5. The "Southern Caucasus BioShield 2010" Tabletop Exercise (TTX) was organized on the second day of the workshop and consisted of facilitated, informal discussions about general policies, procedures, and courses of action driven by a fictional bioterrorism scenario to encourage and enhance information sharing, as well as preparation for, and coordinated response to an international bioterrorism incident, originating in Southern Caucasus upon an operational convergence of criminal and terrorist networks.

6. The name of the TTX and the custom-designed logo (a shield displaying the national flags of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and a faded biohazard sign) were chosen to illustrate the benefits of regional and international partnership in "shielding" countries against bio-threats.

III. General mission areas for participants' consideration

7. General mission areas for participants' consideration:

- (a) Prevention/Deterrence
- (b) Emergency Assessment/Diagnosis
- (c) Emergency Management/ Response
- (d) Hazard Mitigation
- (e) Evacuation/Shelter/Movement Restrictions
- (f) Victim Care
- (g) Public Health Investigation/Law Enforcement Apprehension
- (h) Recovery/Remediation
 - (i) Environmental Decontamination/Cleanup

- (ii) Personal Decontamination
 - (iii) Site Restoration
- (i) Implications
 - (i) Secondary Hazards/Events
 - (ii) Fatalities/Injuries
 - (iii) Property Damage
 - (iv) Service Disruption
 - (v) Economic Impact
 - (vi) Long-term Health Issues

IV. Key lessons learned

8. Key lessons learned:

- (a) National Response Plans offer the framework for coordination and response to biological incidents, whether natural or deliberate, and were validated during the H1N1 national responses;
- (b) Gaps in capabilities and assets may still exist, in particular with regard to providing mental health services, specialized law enforcement units (for collecting, transporting, and testing biological crime scene samples), and sharing information (in particular between public health and law enforcement);
- (c) Since real-world experience does not come often, there is a strong need for more inter-sectoral (including media) training;
- (d) Early warning and efficient mitigation of biological incidents are contingent on effective implementation of WHO IHRs and national legislation (i.e. on UNSCR 1540 and BWC implementation) to prevent and criminalize activities of non-state actors who seek to acquire and proliferate WMDs;
- (e) WHO IHRs notifications and the role of WHO in coordinating the international public health response were well understood and considered by TTX participants;
- (f) There is no mandatory requirement for national law enforcement to pass information to Interpol in case of potential terrorist events even though they may potentially be of international concern. Could law enforcement apply the example of revised WHO IHRs notifications? That is, pass information to Interpol as “law enforcement information of potential international concern” and let Interpol decide whether it is so (action: share with all member states) or is not (action: file in a database with no other action required);
- (g) Established (pre-event) partnership and communication channels between law enforcement and public health (both at the national and the international level) are critical elements for “connecting the dots” early in a potential bio threat/incident.

9. While various workshops were held in the past for joint training of public health, security, and law enforcement communities, this event was a first at the international level by successfully linking the international **response** to a bioterrorism incident stemming from the convergence of criminal and terrorist networks, with **prevention** via nonproliferation mechanisms such as:

(a) BWC, which effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, retention, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons and is a key element in the international community's efforts to address the proliferation of WMDs);

(b) UNSCR 1540, which requires all UN member states to refrain from providing support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, and obligates member states to establish and to enforce domestic controls to secure WMD-related materials and prevent their proliferation), and

(c) NATO's "Comprehensive, Strategic-Level Policy for Preventing the Proliferation of WMDs and Defending against CBRN Threats", and its focus on prevention and strengthening international nonproliferation mechanisms (i.e. BWC, UNSCR 1540, Proliferation Security Initiative, etc); and increased information exchange, engagement, cooperation, and joint training with Partner nations, international and regional organizations, and civilian entities.

10. The report on the workshop and associated TTX, is available online at: http://www.ncdc.ge/W3/Page1_en.htm.