

FACT SHEET BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) opened for signature in 1972 and entered into force in 1975. The Convention is a key element in the international community's efforts to address disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It was the first international treaty prohibiting an entire category of such weapons.



Ambassador Dr György Molnár of Hungary,
President of the Eighth BWC Review Conference,
meeting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in
June 2016

Scope of the Biological Weapons Convention

Key provisions of the Treaty include binding obligations on States parties:

- to never under any circumstances acquire or retain biological weapons (Article I);
- to destroy or divert to peaceful purposes biological weapons and associated resources (Article II);
- to not transfer, or in any way assist, encourage or induce anyone else to acquire or retain biological weapons (Article III);
- to take any national measures necessary to implement the provisions of the BWC domestically (Article IV);
- to consult bilaterally and multilaterally to solve any problems with the implementation of the BWC (Article V);
- to request the UN Security Council to investigate alleged breaches of the BWC and to comply with its subsequent decisions (Article VI);
- to assist States parties which have been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the BWC (Article VII);
- to do all of the above in a way that protects and encourages the peaceful uses of biological science and technology (Article X).

BWC Implementation

BWC States parties strive to ensure that the Convention remains relevant and effective, taking into account the changes since it entered into force. States parties meet every five years to review the operation of the Convention. Between these Review Conferences, States parties have pursued various activities and initiatives to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention.

Since 2002, BWC States parties have developed intersessional work programmes between the Review Conferences that include annual Meetings of Experts and Meetings of States Parties. The Eighth Review Conference took place in November 2016. Ambassador Dr. György Molnár of Hungary presided over the conference which agreed that States parties would continue to hold annual meetings from 2017 to 2020.

The BWC Implementation Support Unit

The BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) is hosted by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) in Geneva. Created in 2006, the BWC ISU forms the core of the Secretariat of BWC meetings; maintains and develops the treaty's website; receives and distributes information submitted by States parties annually under the system of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs); collates details of national measures to implement all aspects of the Convention; acts as a clearing house for requests for and offers of assistance; interacts with relevant international organizations, scientific and academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations; and attends relevant meetings and events to promote the BWC. The ISU also assists the Chair of BWC meetings in promoting universality of the Convention; conducts outreach; administers a sponsorship programme for experts from developing States parties; maintains details of progress towards universality and reports on progress to States parties. The Eighth Review Conference extended the mandate of the ISU until 2021.

Voluntary contributions

Over the last ten years UNODA has received four contributions totalling EUR 6,307,000 from the European Union (EU) to support its BWC related activities. Other States parties have also made voluntary contributions to UNODA to support implementation of the BWC. Together with the ISU, UNODA has used such contributions to assist national implementation efforts, promote the submission of CBMs, and also to raise awareness and promote the universalisation of the Convention. In cooperation with States parties, UNODA has organized regional and national workshops. Further, UNODA in cooperation with subject experts has organized assistance activities for States. Additionally, UNODA has coordinated the development of guidance brochures and electronic systems, and supports participation in BWC meetings by developing countries.

BWC Facts & Figures

- The BWC has 178 States parties. A further six States have signed but not ratified and 12 States have neither signed nor ratified. (As of July 2017).
- Over 100 States parties have provided information through the CBM process. Just over 70 States parties participate annually. The highest participation to date was in 2016 when 81 States parties provided information.
- Around 400 delegates from about 110 States parties participate in annual meetings under the BWC. These meetings regularly include up to 200 technical experts from around the globe.

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