

FACT SHEET

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MECHANISM FOR INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

By the mandate of the UN General Assembly,¹ which was later reaffirmed by the UN Security Council,² the Secretary-General is authorized to investigate the alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin weapons. The mandate of the “Secretary-General’s Mechanism” (SGM) permits the Secretary-General *to carry out investigations in response to reports that may be brought to his attention by any Member State concerning the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons that may constitute a violation of the Geneva Protocol or other relevant rules of customary international law in order to ascertain the facts of the matter and to report promptly the results of any such investigations to all Member States.*

These investigations are to be conducted in accordance with the guidelines and procedures³ that were endorsed by the General Assembly in 1990. The technical appendices to the guidelines and procedures were updated in 2007. In order to be able to conduct these investigations, lists of qualified experts, expert consultants and laboratories⁴ are compiled and maintained. The experts and laboratories are nominated by Member States so that their services may be available for an investigation on a very short notice. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) serves as the custodian of the Secretary-General’s Mechanism.

Activities of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which implements the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), is authorized by the Convention to conduct investigations in cases of an alleged use of chemical weapons. However, in accordance with the CWC, in the case of an alleged use involving a State not party to the CWC and/or in territory not controlled by a State Party, the OPCW shall closely cooperate with the UN Secretary-General and, if so requested, shall place its resources at the disposal of the Secretary-General. In September 2012, the UN and the OPCW concluded an agreement that set out the modalities of cooperation between the two organizations for conducting an investigation in such circumstances. A Supplementary Arrangement Concerning the Implementation of Article II (2) (C) of the Agreement Concerning the Relationship Between the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was concluded in September 2012.

Unlike the CWC, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has no equivalent investigating authority of alleged use. It is therefore particularly important to ensure that the SGM is effectively operational in the biological area. UNODA has cooperative relations and agreements with relevant

¹ UN General Assembly resolution 42/37 C.

² UN Security Council resolution 620 (1988).

³ A/44/561, annex I.

⁴ The experts on the roster can only be replaced or changed upon official notification from their respective governments.

international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in support of the SGM.

In March 2013, based on the authority given to him by the General Assembly and in response to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Secretary-General established the UN Mission to Investigate the Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mission was composed of experts from the OPCW and the WHO. The Head of Mission was appointed by the Secretary-General. For further details, please see information on the separate fact sheet about the investigation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Training of the experts

In order to ensure that experts on the Secretary-General's roster are able to operate efficiently as a United Nations team under challenging field conditions, UNODA facilitates specialized training for these experts. This is part of its overall activities to provide substantive support and coordination for the smooth functioning of the SGM. In accordance with the current technical guidelines and procedures, "any interested Member State may designate to the Secretary-General relevant specialized training or courses available to qualified experts in support of their possible role on his behalf".



The first training course was held from May to June 2009 with funding from the Government of Sweden. It provided comprehensive training for the practical preparation for, and conduct of, on-site fact-finding activities. Fourteen experts from the Secretary-General's roster participated in this training course.

In November 2012, a second training course took place in France, organized by the French Government in cooperation with UNODA. In May 2013, the Government of Denmark hosted a "table-top" exercise and January 2014, a workshop was hosted by Germany. Sweden and the United Kingdom hosted training courses in Umea in June and in Ryton in September, respectively. Building upon these two courses, Germany hosted a full field exercise in Berlin, in November 2014. Another training course was hosted by the Government of France in June 2015, further expanding the number of trained experts on the roster. In addition, the first integrated training of selected experts from SGM roster and staff of the OPCW took place in September 2015 and focused on advanced skills in negotiations and interviewing. Three further training courses took place in Sweden, in Australia, and in the United Kingdom in the second half of 2016, implementing the lessons learned from the 2013 investigation in Syria, in particular a refined training approach developed by UNODA. Continuous training is vital to enhance the effectiveness of the SGM.

For more information:

www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Secretary-General_Mechanism