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# COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

**Fifteenth Session**

**Virtual Meeting, 16, 18 March and 1 April 2021**

**Written reports from international organizations - Report from Biological  
Weapons Convention (BWC)**

**Agenda item 15.2**

**Prepared by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the BWC**

**English only**

**BWC-ISU SUGGESTED INPUT TO THE  
MEETING OF THE COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES**

**A. Biological Weapons Convention: Activities during 2020**

1. Each year from 2018 to 2020, States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) convene a two-day Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX4), in the framework of the BWC intersessional programme (ISP).<sup>1</sup> This topic relates to efforts to strengthen the operationalization of Article VII of the BWC, pursuant to which States Parties undertake to provide assistance in case of the use of biological weapons.. The Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) has been officially invited to attend BWC meetings in the past order to strengthen collaboration and enhance information exchange on this important aspect.
2. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 BWC Meetings of Experts were postponed to a date not earlier than April 2021. Similarly, the 2020 Meeting of States Parties has also been postponed.
3. The BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), has however carried out various activities to continue the dialogue and discussion on the various topics on the agenda for the intersessional period. On 13 May 2020, for example, the ISU organized a webinar for BWC States Parties on ‘The COVID 19 Pandemic: Preliminary lessons for assistance, response and preparedness under the BWC’. The event brought together more than 200 BWC stakeholders from across the globe.
4. To allow for informal discussions to continue in the absence of formal meetings, the ISU organized a series of five webinars in October and November 2020, in cooperation with the Chairs of the five Meetings of Experts. With an average of 158 participants from more than 40 countries, the webinars provided useful opportunities for informal discussions and exchanges of views. One of these webinars, on 12 November 2020, was dedicated to the topic of assistance, response and preparedness in case of use of biological weapons.
5. Furthermore, on 9 December, the ISU in cooperation with Germany and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) organised a virtual workshop, intending to facilitate discussions around science and technology reviews under the BWC.
6. 26 March 2020 marked the 45th anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC. The occasion was marked by a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the launch of a video on the history and scope of the Convention. In addition, statements and other communications were issued by India, the Russian Federation (in Russian and English) and the United States of America, as well as the European Union.
7. During 2020, moreover, activities continued in the context of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) project on “Strengthening global mechanisms to respond to deliberate use of biological agents,” which the ISU coordinates with funds from Canada. The project focuses on the roles and cooperation among relevant offices, department and funds of the United Nations and other international organizations, including humanitarian actors, to support States in their response to a deliberate disease outbreak. The project addresses this question particularly through the lens of Article VII of the BWC, and the indication from BWC States Parties that they would expect the United Nations to play ‘an important role in coordinating, mobilizing and delivering the required support and assistance ‘in such circumstances, with the help of inter alia the appropriate international organizations, ‘in accordance with their respective mandates’.<sup>2</sup>
8. In this regard, States Parties referred specifically to the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), and the IPPC. The IPPC Secretariat, together with 18 relevant UN offices, department, programmes and funds, as well as other relevant international organizations, has been contributing actively to the

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<sup>1</sup> The 2018-2020 intersessional programme consists of annual Meetings of States Parties over four days, which are preceded by five thematic annual Meetings of Experts with a total duration of eight days.

<sup>2</sup> BWC/CONF.VIII/4, Final Declaration, Article VII, para. 39.

activities within the project, which has now been completed with the drafting of an International Bio-Emergency Framework for Deliberate Events and the implementation of action 11 of the UN Secretary-General's 2018 disarmament agenda. The latter mandates UNODA to "work with all relevant UN entities to contribute to developing a framework that ensures a coordinated international response to the use of biological weapons."