

The Secretary-General's Mechanism

Issue 9, January 2025

Newsletter for Nominated Experts and Analytical Laboratories for the Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons



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Dear Colleagues,

We are very pleased to share the ninth issue of our newsletter for the UNSGM with you. In this issue, we have provided a more comprehensive analysis of the current roster and some highlights from the activities organized in support of the UNSGM during the second half of 2024. This included an outreach workshop in Chile, as well as two basic training courses and skill training courses on "Biological Crime Scene Management", "Sampling and Transport of Toxic and Infectious Substances" and "Safe and Secure Approaches to Field Environments".

As we begin the new year, we are pleased to share that the pace of activities will not only continue – but likely increase – depending on the availability of funds. More information about upcoming activities can be found in the final section of the newsletter.

As always, UNODA is very grateful for the generous support extended by all our partners in order to facilitate these valuable skill training courses and other activities in support of the UNSGM.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and please let us know if any feedback.

Your UNODA team in support of the UNSGM,

Chris King

Chief, Weapons of Mass Destruction Branch

Hideki Matsuno

Political Affairs Officer

Courtney Cresap

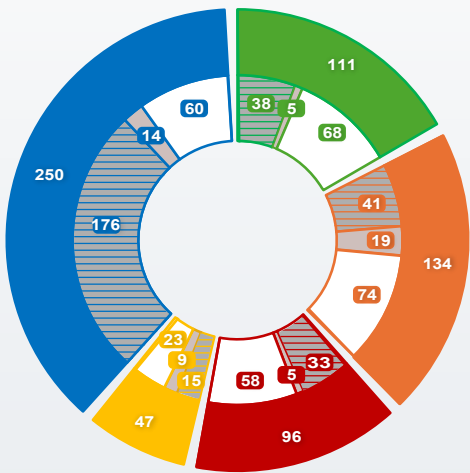
Political Affairs Officer

Lucia Andaya

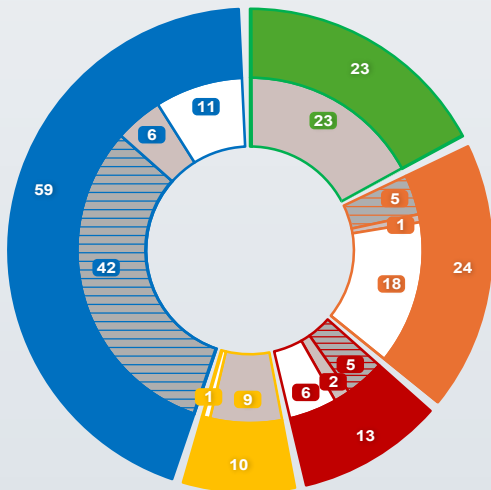
Programme Management Assistant

Status of the UNSGM roster: Nominations of Qualified Experts, Expert Consultants and Analytical Laboratories (as of November 2024)

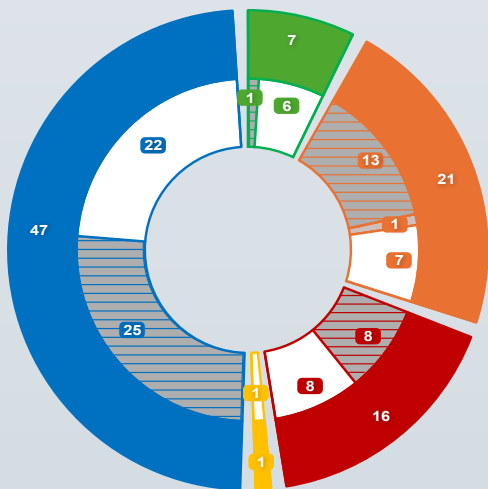
638 QUALIFIED EXPERTS



129 EXPERT CONSULTANTS



92 ANALYTICAL LABORATORIES



The roster of qualified experts, expert consultants and analytical laboratories has increased significantly over the last four years: around 30% for qualified experts, 230% for expert consultants and 11% for analytical laboratories. However, only 56% of rostered qualified experts, 72% of expert consultants and 52% of analytical laboratories are in communication with UNODA.

The charts below show the number of qualified experts, expert consultants and analytical laboratories by region. A more detailed analysis by region is also provided (see inner circles). Active is defined as having responded or been active since December 2021. This includes responding to the annual call-out exercise and participating in UNSGM training courses, the annual onboarding session or round-table discussion, but we have excluded experts and laboratories/laboratory focal points who have been nominated in 2024, as they had limited opportunities to engage.

The gender balance of all nominated experts continues to be about 34% women and 66% men (not included in the graphs).

UNODA is grateful for the nominations by Member States and would appreciate the continuation of this good cooperation. UNODA hopes to increase the response rate for the call-out exercises as well as the interaction with experts and laboratories. For further information, please get in touch with UNODA at unsgm@un.org.

Most nominated experts are well-qualified in one or more areas relevant to a UNSGM investigation. However, as noted in the recent note verbale requesting nominations,¹ UNODA is also looking to further improve the geographical balance and increase the nomination of experts in underrepresented fields, e.g., evidence and investigation data management and documentation, such as crime scene photography and recording; forensic sciences; investigative interviewing; law enforcement, as well as relevant life science disciplines, including specialists in the area of plant pests, advanced sequencing technology, synthetic biology, artificial intelligence, expertise in modelling and epidemiology, biological toxins. The note verbale also highlighted the need to provide relevant information according to UNSGM technical appendices II (experts) and VI (laboratories).

¹ UNODA sends the annual note verbale to the UN Member States' Missions in New York and is also available in the six official UN languages on the [UNSGM website](https://unsgm.un.org).



Joint UNODA Workshop on Strengthening Regional Support for the Global Norm against Biological Weapons in the Context of the BWC, UNSCR 1540, and the UNSGM, Santiago, Chile, 1-3 October 2024

Summary of the Workshop

The three-day workshop for Spanish-speaking Latin American and Caribbean States and Brazil brought together relevant national stakeholders, e.g., representatives from relevant ministries charged with the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (UNSCR 1540), experts in relevant fields, and from relevant laboratories and technical institutions. The presentations and discussions aimed to raise awareness about the three instruments and serve as a forum for discussion, information exchange, and sharing of best practices from the region related to strengthening each instrument.

The first day focused on the BWC and included presentations by staff from the Implementation Support Unit for the BWC (BWC ISU) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). The session began with an overview of the BWC, its main provisions and the current intersessional programme. The Working Group on Strengthening the Convention was then introduced – including an intervention by a delegate from Brazil, whose Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva chairs the Working Group. The session then focused on national implementation of the BWC in the region, with a presentation by the National Contact Point from Chile and concluded with a round-table discussion in which workshop participants shared their experiences, best practices, lessons learned, and challenges in national implementation.

The second day focused on the UNSGM. UNODA provided an overview of the Mechanism's background, mandate and history, as well as the Guidelines and Procedures (A/44/561, annex 1) for a UNSGM investigation. UNODA also shared information about different ways in which Member States can support the mechanism. This included the nomination process for the roster of experts and laboratories that might be called upon to support a UNSGM investigation, as well as the training programme and exercises for experts and laboratories once nominated, and the hosting of outreach or training events. This was followed by group discussion, in which participants considered potential challenges of an investigation and several rostered experts from the region shared their experience with UNSGM activities. The presentation and group discussion were aimed at helping to identify regional national UNSGM focal points.

The third day focused on UNSC Resolution 1540 (2004). A representative from the Group of Experts supporting the Resolution 1540 Committee provided a presentation, followed by a joint session with representatives from the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) and the Organization for American States Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (OAS/CICTE).

In addition to the support provided by the partners mentioned above, financial support for the workshop was generously provided by the European Union and the Government of Canada.



Basic Training Courses

Basic Training Courses aim to provide broader instruction on the UNSGM's background and mandate as a whole, and specifically to provide a deeper understanding of the UNSGM Guidelines & Procedures. These courses are not meant to provide training in the sense that the participants acquire new skills, but rather provide information on the provisions of the Mechanism as well as the life cycle and all elements of a mission, thereby providing an understanding of the complexity of such an investigation and the needs and limitations of each element. Nominated experts receive an introduction to these topics during the annual virtual onboarding sessions, but the Basic Training Courses allow for more in-depth presentations and discussions, establishing an important foundation that the experts will need as they progress to advanced skill training courses and field exercises. To account for the fundamental importance of Basic Training Courses, UNODA established a curriculum for these courses that ensures all participants receive relevant information in a structured manner.

Summary of the Courses

In 2024, UNODA organized two basic courses for nominated experts, in Johannesburg, South Africa, 15-26 July, and Berlin, Germany, 4-15 November, respectively. Both two-week courses had the objective of providing experts with a better understanding of their role in carrying out investigations of alleged use of biological weapons under a UNSGM mandate.

The basic course in Johannesburg, was organized in cooperation with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), a division of the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) of South Africa. This was the third basic training organized with support from the NICD and the Government of South Africa, following the very successful courses in 2022 and 2023, also held at the NICD campus in Johannesburg. A group of 17 rostered experts from 15 countries, representing all UN regions, attended the course.

The course followed the standard curriculum and started with basic information about the UNSGM, including the background, mandate, Guidelines and Procedures, and other components of the Mechanism, provided by UNODA. This was followed by sessions on operational safety and security, cultural awareness, mission planning, communication strategy and field communication, which were provided by a former staff member of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). Representatives from NICD provided technical instruction on topics including risk assessment and personal protective equipment, sampling, sample packaging and transport and decontamination. The course also benefited from presentations by external partners on forensics and chain of custody, mis- and dis-information, options for on-site or in-situ analysis, information gathering, and investigative interviewing, among others. The course concluded with a two-day field exercise for which the NICD provided a scenario, many role players, as well as mock-up newspaper articles and live TV



reporting, which made the exercise realistic and engaging. The participants were split into two groups and were asked to plan their mission, conduct sampling and interviews, and write a preliminary report of their findings. This helped put into practice the knowledge and skills acquired during the previous days of the course.

The basic course in Berlin, which was held in cooperation with the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) of Germany, also followed the standard curriculum, but the RKI invited international experts to support the course. Introduction to sampling and detection was provided by the French Armed Forces Medical Research Institute (IRBA) and the French Direction générale de l'armement

(DGA) and instruction on decontamination was provided by the Military Laboratorial Unit for Biological and Chemical Defense of the Portuguese army. A group of 16 experts on the UNSGM roster from 15 Member States engaged in active discussion about the lectures. This course also ended with a one-and-a-half day field exercise for which the RKI provided a scenario, role players and organized a training ground.

Financial support for the two basic courses were generously provided by the Government of Canada and the European Union. In addition, the Government of Spain generously supported the course in South Africa.

Feedback from Participants

Johannesburg

"Everything was perfect"

"It has been a great opportunity to learn and understand UNSGM and UNSGM missions better, meet highly qualified experts from all over the world."

"a well-balanced training course"

Berlin

"...the horizon now is much broader after these 2 weeks of information and I expect to take part in future meetings."

"I was very satisfied with the training"

"The administrative support for the course was commendable, ensuring smooth coordination."



Training Course on Biological Crime Scene Management

Summary of the Course

From 26-30 August, UNODA organized a skill training course on "Biological Crime Scene Management" in collaboration with INTERPOL's Bioterrorism Prevention Unit and the Public Health Agency of Canada's Microbiology Laboratory. The course took place at the United Nations Global Service Centre – Conference and Learning Centre (UNGSC-CLC) in Brindisi, Italy, and was attended by a group of 21 qualified experts on the UNSGM roster from 17 Member States.

The aim of the course was to provide a better understanding of sampling and evidence management in the context of a possible UNSGM investigation. Training elements included securing samples, exhibits, and evidence in such a way that they are retrieved safely, with legitimacy and authenticity, and consideration for chain of custody.

UNODA provided an introduction to the course and shared relevant information on the UNSGM context for such incidents. Then, representatives from INTERPOL provided instructions to the participants on crime scene operations in an environment that is potentially biologically contaminated. This included a procedure for donning and doffing of personal protective equipment, consideration to access a contaminated scene, initial scene assessment, briefing and sampling strategy, as well as evidence packaging and crime scene documentation. As in the basic training courses, the participants were given technical notes, based on documents provided by the Government of Canada, and an updated chain of custody form. Relevant feedback on these forms will be used to for further improvement.

Representatives from the Public Health Agency of Canada complemented the course with training components on biological sampling, including field testing, laboratory acceptance criteria, and evidence transportation. The course also included several practical components for participants and concluded with a one-day field exercise, in which participants put into practice the knowledge acquired during the first three days of the training course. Here, participants were asked to conduct sampling and evidence management operations in two scenarios with scenes potentially contaminated with biological material.

Overall, this skill training course provided the experts with a more in-depth understanding of bringing together different elements of a potential UNSGM investigation, including working in a potentially contaminated environment, as well as collecting and managing evidence. This was the second bio crime scene management course held in coordination with INTERPOL and

the Public Health Agency of Canada. In addition, financial support for the workshop was generously provided by the European Union and the Government of Canada.

Feedback from Participants

"Good use of practical and theory lessons."

"Very good structure, good methodology and excellent trainers. Well done!"

"Overall, a good course, which I enjoyed and learned some new things."

"Excellent facilities for the course."





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Training Course on Sampling and Transport of Toxic and Infectious Substances

Summary of the Course

From 17-20 September 2024, UNODA organized a skill training course in Berlin on "Sampling and Transport of Toxic and Infectious Substances" in cooperation with the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)'s National Microbiology Laboratory, which was attended by a group of 14 qualified experts on the UNSGM roster from 12 Member States.

The ability to package and ship toxic and infectious substances according to international standards is a crucial element for a potential UNSGM investigation. Through two separate modules, the course provided participating experts with a better understanding of guidelines and practices for sampling and transport of toxic and infectious substances in the context of a possible UNSGM investigation. The first module focused on requirements for transporting toxic and infectious materials and was carried out by a certified by an International Air Transport Association (IATA) trainer. Participants who passed the written exam received an IATA certificate, which allows them to ship such substances and which is valid for two years.

The second module focused on sampling within the context of a UNSGM investigation. A representative from UNODA provided an overview of the relevant portions of the UNSGM Guidelines & Procedures and other relevant context for such incidents.

Then, representatives from PHAC provided instruction and training activities on sampling tools and techniques. The module concluded with a short tabletop exercise on biological sampling and a group activity on entry and sample planning, in which participants were asked to apply the knowledge acquired during the rest of the course.

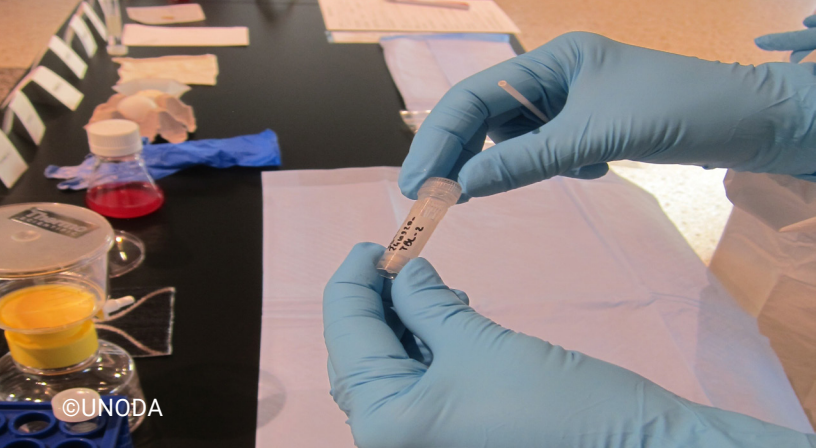
In addition to the support provided by the RKI and PHAC, financial support for the workshop was generously provided by the European Union and the Government of Canada.

Feedback from Participants

"Excellent narration and presentation by the trainer (for IATA)."

"The tabletop exercises from the last day were also very interesting. They brought us a refresher into UNSGM missions and at the same time new view angles and new knowledge."

"It was a very good and challenging course."



Training Course on Safe and Secure Approaches to Field Environments (SSAFE)

Summary of the Course

From 10-16 November, UNODA and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) organized a training course in Thailand on "Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments" (SSAFE), which was attended by a group of 20 qualified experts from 16 Member States.

The aim of the course was to provide the group of experts with a better understanding of the UN Security Management System and the practical skills that will help them prevent or respond effectively to various higher-risk safety or security incidents. The course followed the SSAFE training curriculum, which is based on UNDSS and UN System Staff College (UNSSC) standard modules and was delivered by SSAFE trainers who are UNDSS and UNSSC certified.

Representatives from UNDSS provided an overview of the UN Security Management System and general guidelines for working in field environments. Participants also received training on medical elements of working in the field, with theoretical lessons, demonstrations, and practical exercises on individual first aid and managing injuries in field environments. The course concluded with a half-day field simulation, in which participants put into practice the lessons covered during the first five days of the course. Participants further completed

relevant testing and received certifications in both SSAFE and Individual First Aid at the end of the course. Finally, to wrap up, UNODA led participants in an interactive discussion on how the skills covered in the course could be applied in the context of a UNSGM investigation.

This was the third SSAFE course organized for the UNSGM and, as with previous courses, it provided the participating experts with a common understanding of the United Nations principles, guidelines and policies to enhance their security awareness, should they join a UNSGM investigation. These are elements that will be critical for experts to understand should they be deployed as part of a UN team and successful completion of an SSAFE course is a prerequisite to be deployed to the field and thus this is the only mandatory course for qualified experts. As such, UNODA is very appreciative for the cooperation extended by UNDSS in developing and implementing these SSAFE courses tailored for the UNSGM.

In addition to the support provided by UNDSS, financial support for the workshop was generously provided by the European Union and the Government of Canada.

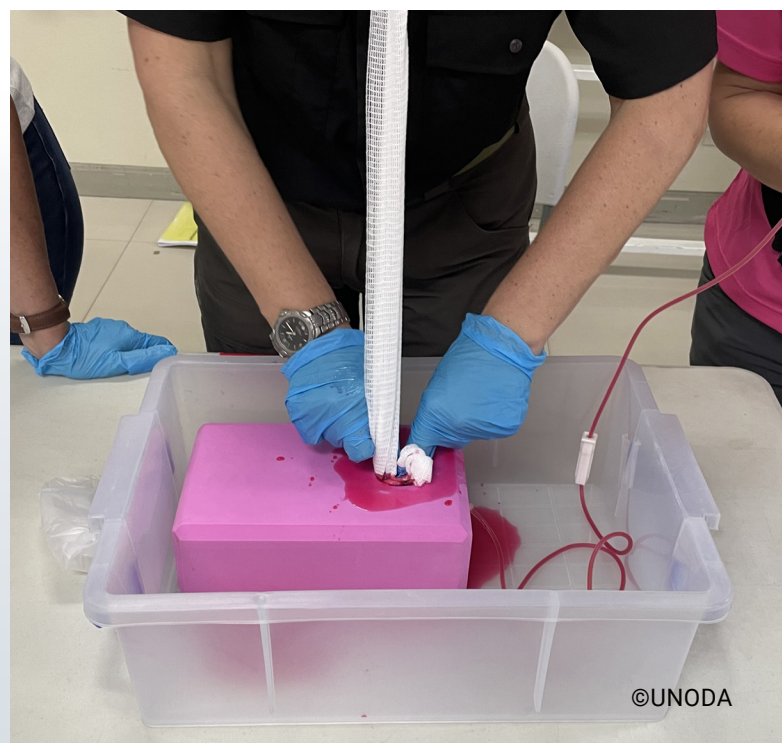
Feedback from Participants

"The teaching methodology was really good. The trainers had vast experience in the topics that were presented to us."

"I found the training very useful. It comprised a wide variety of topics that most of the participants had not experienced before or even imagined we could be involved in such a complex situation."

"The final exercise scenarios simulated were very real."

"Thank you for the opportunity to attend this training. Not only did it provide valuable new skills it was a great opportunity to continue team building with colleagues I have met on previous training and establish relationships with new colleagues."



Update on Activities

UNODA Activities (July-December 2024)

- > **OPCW-UNSGM Working Group on Biotoxins:** The second meeting of the informal OPCW-UNSGM working group on biotoxins was held in September 2024, in the margins of the 9th Spiez laboratory workshop. The meeting was held in virtual format and open to all UNSGM-rostered laboratories that had previously indicated interest in participating in the working group.
- > **Briefing to Member States:** In October 2024, UNODA provided another briefing on the UNSGM for all UN Member States at UN Headquarters in New York.
- > **Note Verbale for Nominations:** In December 2024, UNODA sent the annual request to all UN Member States (via Note Verbale to the Missions in New York) for new or updated nominations of experts and laboratories to the UNSGM roster. The Note Verbale, in all six UN languages, can also be found on the [UNSGM website page](#).

- > **Call-Out Exercise:** In December 2024, UNODA conducted the annual call-out exercise to test the responsiveness and availability of experts and laboratories on the roster. The results are currently being evaluated and UNODA will follow up with Member States as needed.
- > **Virtual Round-table Discussion:** In December 2024, UNODA hosted a virtual round-table discussion for all nominated experts (qualified experts and expert consultants), as well as focal points for nominated laboratories, on the UNSGM roster. The discussion featured an outline of the workshop on predeployment orientation by Alberto Muti from the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC); the workshop report is available on [VERTIC's website](#). Cédric Invernizzi from the Spiez Laboratory presented their annual UNSGM-designated laboratory workshops. The workshop reports are available on the [Spiez Laboratory website](#).

Partner Activities (July-December 2024)

- > **RefBio EQAEs:** In September and October 2024, in the framework of the RefBio Project organized by the Robert Koch Institute, external quality assurance exercises (EQAEs) on biological toxins, bacteria, and viruses were launched. Samples were shipped in September 2024 for the biological toxin EQAE (focused on staphylococcal enterotoxins) and October 2024 for the bacterial and viral EQAEs (focused on *Yersinia pestis* and Filoviruses, respectively).
- > **UNSGM Designated Laboratories Workshop:** In September 2024, Spiez Laboratory in Switzerland hosted the ninth UNSGM Designated Laboratories Workshop. The workshop report is available [online](#).

- > **Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction:** In December 2024, in Rome, Italy, UNODA provided an update on UNSGM activities and opportunities to strengthen the Mechanism.
- > **Global Workshop for National Points of Contact for the Biological Weapons Convention:** In December 2024, in Geneva, UNODA hosted a side event in the margins of this meeting and provided information about the UNSGM. The side event was kindly supported by Cédric Invernizzi, Spiez Laboratory and made possible with the generous financial support from the Government of Canada.

Upcoming Activities

The dates for events and registration details will be confirmed and circulated in due course. The implementation of all courses depends on the availability of funds. For any questions regarding upcoming events listed, please feel free to reach out to UNODA and the Office will put you in touch with the relevant organizer(s).

Training Activities

- > **Basic Training Courses:** South Africa will host a fourth basic training course from 9-20 June 2025.
- > **IATA Shipping Course:** South Africa will host the course in early July 2025 (TBD).

- > **SSAFE Courses:** From 9-15 March 2025 and 5-11 October 2025, UNODA will organize two additional training courses on "Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments" (SSAFE) in cooperation with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in Thailand.
- > **2025 Courses:** UNODA has also received tentative offers from partners and Member States for additional basic training and skill training courses in 2025. Priority courses for UNODA include, inter alia, basic training for qualified experts (two-week); basic training for expert consultants (one-week); "refresher" basic training for previously trained qualified experts (one-week); skill training for qualified experts on investigative interview skills, sampling and

transport of toxic and infectious substances, and biological crime scene management (all one-week). Further details will be announced once confirmed.

Outreach

- > **Regional Outreach Workshops:** In 2025, UNODA plans to organize in-person regional outreach workshop in regions currently underrepresented on the UNSGM roster, including Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.
- > UNODA will also continue to participate in relevant conferences and workshops to raise awareness about the UNSGM.

Other Activities

- > **UN ITF Coordination Meeting:** In early 2025 (dates TBC), UNODA will host another hybrid coordination meeting for members of the UN Internal Task Force (ITF).
- > **Onboarding Sessions:** In the first half of 2025, UNODA will again organize the annual virtual onboarding sessions for all newly nominated experts and laboratories. Dates for the sessions will be circulated in due course.
- > **Workshops with Partners:** Throughout 2025, UNODA will support three workshops organized by VERTIC focused on documentation for a UNSGM investigation, as well as a workshop organized by the Stimson Center on investigations in a non-permissive environment. Participation in these workshops is by invitation only.

Supporting the UNSGM

UNODA's work to ensure the readiness of the UNSGM is made possible by generous financial support and in-kind contributions, such as the provision of training material and hosting events, from Member States. We are especially grateful for the financial support from Canada, Spain, the United States and the European Union. In-kind contributions, such as hosting events and providing material were provided by Canada, China, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the European Union. We also appreciate the support from our international partner organizations, including INTERPOL and the OPCW. This voluntary support from Member States and organizations is a cornerstone for ensuring and improving operational readiness of the UNSGM.

Thank you for your interest in our newsletter. We send this newsletter twice a year and we would welcome your contributions to future editions.

- > **UNSGM Designated Laboratories Workshop:** From 9-11 September 2025, Spiez Laboratory in Switzerland will host the tenth UNSGM Designated Laboratories Workshop.
- > **Briefing to Member States:** In October 2025 (date TBC), UNODA will provide another briefing on the UNSGM for all UN Member States at UN Headquarters in New York.
- > **Note Verbale for Nominations:** In late 2025, UNODA will send the annual request to all UN Member States (via Note Verbale to the Missions in New York) for new or updated nominations of experts and laboratories to the UNSGM roster. *Note: Member States can submit nominations at any time, however, and the previous note verbale for nominations circulated in December 2024 is available for reference on the UNSGM [website page](#).
- > **Virtual Events for Experts:** In late 2025 (date TBC), UNODA will again host a virtual round-table discussion for all nominated experts (qualified experts and expert consultants), as well as focal points for nominated laboratories, on the UNSGM roster.

Personnel update

- > With the generous support from the US government, UNODA plans to hire a regional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen the regional support for the Mechanism.
- > Christine Uhlenhaut, Senior Political Affairs Officer, has left the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Contact us

Questions, concerns, suggestions? Please do not hesitate to contact UNODA with any questions regarding supporting the UNSGM or if you are interested in participating in activities.

We would love to hear from you!
Please contact us here:



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