Operationalizing Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention













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Operationalizing Article VII of The Biological Weapons Convention

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INTRODUCTION

Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) addresses the issue of assistance to States Parties that might have been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention. It provides that "Each State Party to this Convention undertakes to provide or support assistance, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, to any Party to the Convention which so requests, if the Security Council decides that such Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention." Article VII does not outline any specific procedures for requesting assistance, nor how potential assistance providers (States, international organizations, etc.) could offer support or assistance to a requesting State Party. To date, Article VII has never been invoked, therefore no relevant practice exists relating to its operationalization.

As will be detailed in Chapter I, BWC States Parties have considered the provisions of Article VII and its operationalization on several occasions. Additional understandings and agreements on Article VII were reached by States Parties at various review conferences. The topics addressed by the additional understandings and agreements cover, *inter alia*, aspects related to preparedness at both the national and international levels; capacity-building to strengthen States Parties' ability to detect and respond; the question of the provision of assistance pending a decision by the United Nations Security Council; the possible role of the United Nations and coordination with other international organizations; required assistance measures and the need for procedures for the provision of assistance; the lessons deriving from the international response to the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in 2014-2015 and the relationship between health and security.[1]

The Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention which was established by the Ninth BWC Review Conference in 2022[2] has been considering 'Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII' and has developed a number of draft recommendations in this regard. Several proposals made by States Parties for the operationalization of Article VII have been considered by the Working Group, and discussions are currently at an advanced stage.[3] Seven draft recommendations on assistance, preparedness

1 The full text of these additional understandings and agreements can be found in document BWC/CONF.IX/PC/5, 10 January 2022: Additional understandings and agreements reached by previous Review Conferences relating to each article of the Convention. Background information document submitted by the Implementation Support Unit.

2 See document BWC/CONF.IX/9*, 22 December 2022. Final Document of the Ninth Review Conference.

3 A detailed account of the development of the draft recommendations on assistance, re-

and response have been agreed ad referendum by the Working Group.

As part of its support to BWC States Parties in the comprehensive implementation of the Convention, the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the BWC has conducted several activities on Article VII.[4]

The United States of America recently provided a voluntary contribution to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) to promote, *inter alia,* strengthened preparedness and response capabilities under Article VII. In particular, the contribution supports deliberations among States Parties towards operationalizing the provisions of Article VII, taking into account the draft recommendations on assistance, response and preparedness emerging from the Working Group.

Activities supported include: i) an international workshop on the operationalization of Article VII, which was held on 18 and 19 May 2026; ii) a table-top exercise (TTX) that tested some aspects of the operationalization of Article VII which was held on 21 and 22 July 2026; iii) a working paper to contribute to discussions within the BWC Working Group; iv) a side event on the findings from the workshop and TTX, which will take place on 20 August 2026 on the margins of the ninth session of the Working Group; and v) this publication addressing the operationalization of Article VII taking into recommendations emerging from the Working Group.

This publication aims to offer an overview of the interpretative issues relating to Article VII, the related practical challenges, the efforts by States Parties to address these shortcomings and to reflect the outcome of previous activities. Particularly, the activities, and this publication, aim to offer considerations on the practical implications of the Working Group's recommendations in the area of assistance, response and preparedness as well as with regard to other aspects of the operationalization of Article VII that have currently remain unaddressed.

Chapter 1 of this publication traces the origins of Article VII during the negotiations of the Convention, showing how an initially more developed concept of emergency assistance was ultimately retained only in a residual form, without the procedural, investigative and institutional architecture needed to make it readily operational. The chapter also analyses the principal interpretative questions arising from this drafting history, including the scope and nature of the

sponse and preparedness agreed ad referendum by the Working Group can be found in Chapter 2.2 of this publication.

4 For a summary of the ISU's activities in support of States Parties' initiatives relating to the operationalization of Article VII, see document BWC/WG/4/1, dated 7 June 2024, paragraphs 14 to 21.

assistance obligation, the implications of the Security Council's role, the meaning of "violation of the Convention" and "exposed to danger", and the absence of a dedicated implementation mechanism within the BWC framework. It also describes the gradual achievement of common understandings on Article VII through Review Conferences and intersessional processes, from the first substantive elaborations at the Third Review Conference in 1991 to the more detailed proposals advanced in the lead-up to and during the Ninth Review Conference in 2022.

Chapter 2 focuses on efforts towards the operationalization of Article VII within the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention established by the Ninth Review Conference from its procedural launch in early 2023 to the negotiation of draft recommendations in 2026, including their adoption *ad referendum*. The chapter shows how Article VII emerged as one of the Working Group's most advanced and practically focused areas of work. The chapter traces Article VII-related discussions and demonstrates how accumulated proposals and prior understandings have been translated into negotiated, action-oriented outcomes within the BWC framework.

Chapter 3 presents the key findings, as well as best practices and practical considerations for future consideration by the Working Group and States Parties drawing on insights generated from the workshop in May 2026 and the TTX in July 2026. It identifies how States Parties can move from the legal and political recognition of Article VII to more workable arrangements for assistance, response and preparedness in the event that a State Party is exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention. In doing so, the chapter situates Article VII within the broader architecture of the BWC, emphasizing its relationship with national implementation under Article IV, consultation and transparency under Article V and international cooperation and capacity-building under Article X.

With a complex negotiating history, the road towards interpreting and promoting the practical operationalization of Article VII has been long characterized by the achievement of important milestones as reflected in this publication. The adoption *ad referendum* of seven recommendations by the eighth session of the Working Group in February 2026 represents a critical step forward in that direction. It is hoped that this publication contributes to the understanding of the history of Article VII and to its future operationalization. The financial contribution by the United States of America, which made this work possible, is highly appreciated.

1. ARTICLE VII OF THE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

1.1 Introduction

Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) establishes the undertaking of each State Party to provide or support assistance to any other Party that has been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention, subject to a determination by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that such exposure has occurred. The article reads as follows:

> *"Each State Party to this Convention undertakes to provide or support assistance, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, to any Party to the Convention which so requests, if the Security Council decides that such Party has been exposed to danger as a result of violation of the Convention."*

As of the date of this publication, no State Party has ever invoked Article VII. The provision has thus generated no implementing practice, and the Convention offers no detailed procedure or mechanism by which a State Party could, in fact, request the assistance it contemplates, were the conditions for doing so to arise. Article VII has been actively debated in BWC forums over the years, constituting an article on which States Parties have reached additional understandings and agreements, particularly at the Eighth Review Conference in 2016, and it has been the subject of dedicated expert consideration across multiple intersessional programmes since 2003.

This chapter proceeds along two principal lines of analysis. The first briefly examines the history of the negotiations of the article, the choices made and foregone during the drafting process and the interpretative questions that arise from the text as adopted. The second traces the progressive elaboration by States Parties of shared understandings with respect to Article VII through successive Review Conferences, Meetings of States Parties and intersessional programmes, including the substantive proposals presented to the Ninth Review Conference in 2022.

1.2 Negotiating History

Negotiations on what would become the BWC were conducted within the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) and its successor body, the

Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD), between August 1968 and September 1971. Dr Jean Pascal Zanders carried out a detailed analysis of these negotiations relating to Article VII.[5] The following paragraphs reflect his findings.



426th Plenary Meeting of the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament under the Chairmanship of Hussein Khallaf, Representative of the United Arab Republic, 7 August 1968. Photo credit: UNOG.

The provisions that ultimately became Article VII had their origins in a draft convention submitted by the United Kingdom on 10 July 1969, accompanied by a proposed UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution[6]. As Sims notes, the "Accompanying Resolution" of the UNSC was "envisaged in each of the draft conventions between 1969 and 1971". It was intended to proclaim the readiness of the Security Council "to allow the complaint procedure under Article VI to be activated, should a complainant apply to it for redress". Fifteen days after the Convention was opened for signature on 10 April 1972 three members of the Security Council introduced the Accompanying Resolution, which, however, was never adopted.[7]

5 Zanders, J. P. (2018). The Meaning of "Emergency Assistance": Origins and Negotiation of Article VII of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Ferney-Voltaire: The Trench. Available at**:** https://www.the-trench.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Meaning-of-Emergency-Assistance-Final.pdf. See also Zanders J.P. (ed. 2022). Operationalising Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention, United Nations, available at https://www.the-trench.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/202204-BTWC-ISU-Article-VII-Operationalisation.pdf.

6 Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee ENDC/255, 10 July 1969, quoted in Zanders (2018),p. 13.

7 Sims (2001), pp. 54-55. "Under the resolution the Security Council was: (i) to declare its readiness (a) to consider immediately any complaints lodged under Article VI of the Convention; (b) to take all necessary measures for the investigation of a complaint; (c) to inform the States Parties to the Convention of the results of the investigation; and (ii) to call upon all States Parties to co-operate for the purpose of

The United Kingdom's draft reflected a coherent and integrated design with respect to the question of assistance. Draft Articles III and IV operated in conjunction. The former established a complaints mechanism whereby a State Party that believed it had been the victim of biological weapons (BW) use could lodge a complaint with the UN Secretary-General (UNSG), who would conduct an investigation and report findings to the Security Council. The latter addressed the need for other States Parties to provide or support appropriate assistance under the UN Charter if the UN Security Council concludes that biological weapons were used against the complaining State.[8]

In presenting the draft to the ENDC, the United Kingdom clarified that it intended Article IV it as a tool for individual rather than collective action, which exclusively consisted of victim assistance[9]. Moreover, "the execution of draft Article IV on emergency assistance did not depend on a UNSC conclusion of a treaty violation but rather reflected the United Kingdom view that (individual) assistance was a moral and humanitarian responsibility under the UN Charter."[10] Dr Zanders explains that draft Article IV, together with draft Article III (on investigation of alleged biological weapons use), were seen as a 'deterrent' and as functional substitutes for lack of a verification mechanism, which was considered impossible at the time.[11]

In August 1969, the United Kingdom presented a revised text of the draft Convention Convention and the draft UNSC resolution. The key change to the concept of emergency assistance in case of BW use was the inclusion of a new preambular paragraph in the draft UNSC resolution reaffirming the inherent right to individual and collective self-defence, recognized under Article 51 of the UN Charter.[12] This reference introduced the possibility of reading a military or defensive dimension into the assistance undertaking, which remains an ambiguity capable of being interpreted differently by different States Parties. This implied the loss of the strict separation between victim assistance and confronting the aggressor. At the same time, assistance could now mean many different things besides "humanitarian".[13]

implementing the provisions of this Resolution."

8 Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1969). Final Verbatim Record of the Four Hundred and Eighteenth Meeting. ENDC/PV.418, pp. 10–11, quoted in Zanders (2018),cit., p. 18.

9 Zanders J. P. (2018), p. 15.

10 Zanders J. P. (ed. 2022),p. 3.

11 Id.

12 United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1969). Biological Warfare: Draft Convention and accompanying draft Security Council Resolution [Revised]. ENDC/255/Rev.1; Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1969). Final Verbatim Record of the Four Hundred and Thirty-First Meeting. ENDC/PV.431, p. 15, quoted in Zanders (2018),cit., p. 17.

13 See Zanders J. P. (2018),p. 18.

Discussions on the draft convention intensified after 30 March 1971 when the group of nine Socialist countries submitted their own draft treaty,[14] which contained no provisions addressing the consequences and response to alleged biological weapons use. In this proposal, the draft convention had abandoned its original prohibition on biological weapons use, limiting its scope to weapon elimination (the prohibition of development, production, stockpiling, acquisition and retention). This shift materially altered the operative meaning of "violation of the Convention" in Article VII, disconnecting it from the use scenarios that had animated the United Kingdom's original drafting and extending it in principle to the full range of prohibited activities under draft Article I.[15] On 19 August 1971, Morocco signalled its interest in reinstating the United Kingdom's original humanitarian assistance provision and subsequently tabled a working paper proposing the insertion of a new article — one that made no reference to either the Security Council or the United Nations Charter.[16] It bears noting that on 10 August 1971, the United Kingdom had reiterated before the CCD that "appropriate assistance" should be understood primarily as action of a medical or humanitarian relief nature.[17]

Argentina then proposed to reinsert the UK's original draft Article IV in the treaty text[18]. "Even though the debates on interpreting emergency assistance would continue during the next two weeks, they ended with the acceptance of the Moroccan proposal as modified by Argentina later in August, which is now BWC Article VII." Therefore, Article VII survived in a residual form, devoid of the procedural and institutional infrastructure that would have been required to render it operational.

14 Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1971). Draft Convention on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological (biological) weapons and toxins and on their destruction. Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. CCD/325, quoted in Zanders J. P. (2018),p. 13.

15 See Zanders J. P. (ed. 2022), p. 4.

16 Zanders (ed. 2022), p. 2, quoting " Morocco (1971). Working paper on drafts CCD/337* and CCD/338* on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons and on their destruction. Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. CCD/347, para. 3 " ; Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1971). Final Verbatim Record of the Five Hundred and Thirty-First Meeting. CCD/PV.531, p. 16, quoted in Zanders J. P. (2018), pp. 29-30.

17 Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1971). Final Verbatim Record of the Five Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Meeting. CCD/PV.528, 10 August 1971, p. 27, para. 90, quoted in Zanders J. P. (2018), p. 29.

18 Zanders (ed. 2022), p. 30.



1.3 Interpretative Issues Arising from Article VII

The negotiating history of Article VII, and the text of this provision as it currently stands give rise to several interpretative questions that have shaped the subsequent evolution of common understandings among States Parties. The principal issues in this respect are addressed below.

1.3.1 The Nature and Scope of the Assistance Obligation

Article VII does not define the term "assistance". As mentioned above, the negotiating record, while not constituting a formal source of treaty interpretation under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, seems to support a humanitarian reading of the obligation. However, there remains interpretative uncertainty as to whether the provision might also encompass military or defensive action.[19]

A further dimension of the scope question concerns the identity of the party whose conduct constitutes the triggering violation. As originally conceived, Article VII presupposed a violation by one State Party against another, implying that the provision could be activated only in inter-state scenarios. At the same time, successive Review Conferences noted "*the willingness of States Parties, where appropriate, to provide or support assistance to any State Party which so requests, when that State Party has been exposed to danger or damage as a result of the use of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins as weapons*

19 Zanders J. P. (2018), p. 35; BWC Implementation Support Unit (2016). Additional understandings and agreements reached by previous Review Conferences relating to each article of the Convention. Preparatory Committee of the Eighth Review Conference. BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/4, pp. 13–15.

by anyone other than a State Party."[20]

1.3.2 The Role of the Security Council and the Veto Constraint

The conditionality embedded in the Security Council determination requirement has consistently been identified as the most structurally problematic feature of Article VII. In the context of a biological emergency, where time is of the essence and where the imperative for prompt humanitarian and health response may arise before the question of deliberate cause has been resolved, reliance upon the Security Council determination that is susceptible to the veto of any permanent member constitutes a significant structural vulnerability.[21]

1.3.3 The Operative Meaning of "Violation of the Convention" and "Exposed to Danger"

Two related questions of interpretation attach to the triggering conditions specified in Article VII. The first concerns the scope of the phrase "***violation of the Convention***". The term "***violation***" in the Convention's operative provisions explicitly encompasses the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, retention, and transfer of prohibited biological agents and weapons under Article I, as well as the transfer and assistance prohibitions under Article III. While the Convention provides no explicit prohibition on biological weapons use, however, additional agreements and understandings reached by States Parties reaffirmed "*that the use by States Parties, in any way and under any circumstances, of microbial or other biological agents or toxins, that is not consistent with prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes, is effectively a violation of Article I.*"[22]

The second question concerns the phrase "***exposed to danger***". This formulation implies that the obligation to provide or support assistance is engaged prior to the full materialization of harm, that is, without requiring proof that casualties have been sustained or that a biological attack has been fully carried out. The requisite degree of imminence or probability, and the evidentiary standard that would be required to satisfy the Security Council that a State Party has been thus exposed, are matters that the text leaves unaddressed, with direct practical implications for the formulation of any request for assistance.

20 BWC/CONF.IX/PC/5, p. 15, para 87.

21 BWC/MSP/2010/6, para. 20(c)–(d), identifying as distinct challenges "the potentially complex and sensitive interface between an international public health response and international security issues" and "the public health and humanitarian imperatives of a prompt and timely response". Lampalzer and Santori (2019), pp. 26–28, analyse the structural consequences of UNSC conditionality in comparable detail. See also Sims (2001), pp. 58–60, on the design choices that produced this vulnerability.

22 BWC/CONF.IX/PC/5, p. 3, para 9.

1.3.4 The Absence of Institutional Infrastructure

A further and fundamental interpretative gap concerns the procedural and institutional dimension of the article. The Chemical Weapons Convention, which established the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), empowered its Technical Secretariat, inter alia, to initiate an investigation within 24 hours of receiving a request for assistance in case of use of chemical weapons under Article X, and to provide assistance upon a decision taken by the Executive Council. In contrast, the BWC has no equivalent institutional mechanism.[23]

The BWC ISU, established pursuant to a decision of the Sixth Review Conference in 2006, exercises a mandate limited to administrative and implementation support functions. It possesses no authority to initiate procedures, no capacity to coordinate field operations, and no resources to undertake investigations. In the absence of prior agreed arrangements, the operationalization of Article VII in a real emergency would require improvised coordination among States Parties, relevant international organizations, and the Security Council, without the benefit of pre-established command structures, communication protocols, or resource allocation mechanisms. In this regard, States Parties reached additional understandings and agreements on international institutional coordination by considering that "in the event that this Article might be invoked, the United Nations could play a coordinating role in providing and delivering assistance under the BWC, with the help of States Parties as well as the appropriate intergovernmental organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)."[24]

1.4 Evolution of Understandings Through Review Conferences and Intersessional Processes

1.4.1 From the First to the Eighth Review Conferences (1980 - 2016)

During the early decades of the Convention's existence, Article VII attracted limited attention in the context of the review process. The Final Declarations of

23 Chemical Weapons Convention, Art. X(7)(c), requiring the OPCW Technical Secretariat, upon receipt of a request for assistance, to "immediately" pass the request to the Executive Council and notify all States Parties and "immediately, on an emergency basis, provide assistance". The twenty-four-hour response requirement is set out in OPCW Executive Council decision EC-XVII/DEC.7. The contrast with the BWC's absence of any equivalent mechanism is noted in Lampalzer and Santori (2019), p. 29; and Sims (2001), pp. 119–122.

24 BWC/CONF.IX/PC/5, p. 154, para 79.

both the First Review Conference (1980)[25] and the Second Review Conference (1986) confined their treatment of the provision to an acknowledgement that it had not been invoked.[26] In the prevailing Cold War environment, substantive engagement with the mutual assistance obligations arising under Article VII was politically constrained. The diplomatic preference among States Parties was to avoid elaborating procedures whose potential activation would itself signify a catastrophic failure of the deterrence logic underlying the Convention's compliance framework.

The heightened concern generated by the 1990–91 Gulf War regarding the biological weapons capabilities of Iraq imparted a new urgency to deliberations on Article VII at the Third Review Conference, which convened in September 1991, less than six months following the cessation of hostilities. For the first time, States Parties engaged substantively with the provision, reaching three new additional understandings of material significance.[27]

The first of these understandings reaffirmed the existing obligation under Article VII. The second introduced an important practical qualification: States Parties acknowledged that, pending a Security Council determination, "timely emergency assistance could be provided by States Parties if requested". This understanding represented a significant departure from the literal terms of the article, establishing for the first time a shared appreciation that the Security Council determination should not constitute a precondition to humanitarian action. The third understanding identified the United Nations and appropriate intergovernmental organizations, including the WHO, as having a coordinating role in the event of the article's invocation.

The Fourth Review Conference (1996) largely reaffirmed the understandings reached in 1991, adding a single new element: the Conference took note of "the proposal [originally by Iran] that the Ad Hoc Group [established in 1995 with the mandate to negotiate a legally binding compliance and verification protocol to the Convention] might need to discuss the detailed procedure for assistance in order to ensure that timely emergency assistance would be provided by States Parties if requested"[28]. The Ad Hoc Group addressed the question of assistance in case of use of biological weapons in the context of its work. Sims notes that "in the relevant part (Article VI) of the rolling text of the BTWC protocol, the Ad Hoc Group has taken both the title of its draft provisions (Assistance and Protection Against Biological and Toxin Weapons), and much of

25 BWC/CONF.VIII/4, p. 15, para 27.
26 BWC/CONF.II/13/II, p. 7; Sims (2001), pp. 122–124.
27 BWC/CONF.III/22/Add.2, p. 13; Sims (2001), pp. 58–60.
28 BWC/CONF.IV/9, p. 22. See Sims (2001), p. 60.

the language negotiated by mid-2000, from Article X of the CWC.[29]" As it is known, the work of Ad Hoc Group on a legally binding protocol collapsed in 2001, and brough with it the failure of the Fifth Review Conference to adopt a final declaration.

Three developments of relevance to Article VII shaped deliberations at the Sixth Review Conference in 2006. The outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003–04 had exposed significant vulnerabilities in international disease surveillance and early warning systems. The revision of the International Health Regulations (IHR) by the World Health Organization in 2005 had established new binding obligations on States to develop, strengthen, and maintain the capacity to detect, assess, notify, and report public health events.[30] The Final Declaration of the Sixth Review Conference (2011) acknowledged the nexus between these public health developments and the Convention's security objectives, recording that national preparedness on the part of States Parties contributes to international capabilities for response, investigation, and mitigation of disease outbreaks.[31]

A further and significant normative development at the Sixth Review Conference was the extension of an Article VII-related additional understanding, namely to encompass the provision or support of assistance upon exposure to danger or damage as a result of the use of a biological agent by any perpetrator. For the first time, States Parties recorded their willingness to provide assistance in the event of the use of biological agents and toxins as weapons "***by anyone other than a State Party***", thereby acknowledging that the provision's scope should not only be confined to inter-state violations.[32]

The 2007–2010 intersessional programme addressed Article VII-related themes with greater specificity than had previously been the case, incorporating among its topics 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***", together with the strengthening of national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection, and diagnosis.[33]

The Seventh Review Conference (2011) constituted a significant juncture in the evolution of Article VII understandings. States Parties agreed to designate

29 Sims (2001), p. 60 quoting the "Procedural Report of the Ad Hoc Group, Twentieth Session, BWC/AD HOC GROUP/52, 11 Aug. 2000, part I, pp. 96–98".
30 World Health Organization (2005). International Health Regulations. Second Edition. Geneva: World Health Organization, Art. 59.
31 BWC/CONF.VI/6, p. 14.
32 BWC/CONF.VI/6, p. 14.
33 BWC/CONF.VI/6, p. 21.

Article VII as a substantive topic for the 2012–2015 intersessional programme and to approach the provision with a view to considering detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.[34]

Two elements of the additional understandings adopted in 2011 were of particular significance. The recognition by States Parties that health and security considerations are interrelated at both the national and international levels represented an explicit acknowledgement of the interface between the Convention's disarmament mandate and the broader global health security architecture. Of equal operational importance was the agreement that effective assistance measures should be relevant "***irrespective of whether a disease outbreak is naturally occurring or deliberately caused***", which is a formulation reflecting the empirical reality that deliberate causation may not be established until well after international response mechanisms have been mobilized.[35]

The intersessional discussions during 2014 and 2015 took place in the context of the Ebola virus disease epidemic in West Africa, which, while not of deliberate origin, served as a significant point of reference for the identification of gaps in international emergency response capacity. In that environment, South Africa began developing a series of working papers proposing voluntary guidelines and procedural templates for the submission of assistance requests under Article VII — an initiative that would be refined and resubmitted across multiple subsequent intersessional sessions and Review Conferences.[36]

At the Eighth Review Conference in 2016, States Parties adopted additional understandings that consolidated and extended the positions reached in prior review cycles. Drawing upon the experience of the Ebola epidemic, the Final Declaration underscored the importance of rapid detection and prompt, effective, and coordinated response in addressing outbreaks of infectious disease, and affirmed that measures for assistance and preparedness should apply regardless of whether an outbreak is of natural, accidental, or deliberate origin.[37]

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34 BWC/CONF.VII/7, III. B. para. 9 (b), p. 21.

35 BWC/CONF.VII/7, II. para. 33.

36 Guthrie, R. (2020). BWC Article VII & Article X discussions relevant to disease outbreak response. In COVID-19 Impact Report 3. BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP), pp. 5–6; South Africa submitted working papers at BWC/MSP/2014/MX/WP.9; BWC/MSP/2015/MX/WP.10; BWC/CONF.VIII/WP.34; BWC/MSP/2018/MX.4/WP.3 and WP.4.

37 BWC/CONF.VIII/4, II. paras 35 and 47.



Delegations at the Eighth BWC Review Conference, 7-25 November 2016. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

With respect to the pre-UNSC assistance question, the Eighth Review Conference went further than any predecessor in articulating the normative basis for prompt emergency action. The Final Declaration characterized the encouragement of States Parties in a position to do so to provide timely emergency assistance pending a Security Council determination as reflecting a "***humanitarian imperative***".[38] While this language does not create a legal obligation and remains in the domain of political commitments, it represents the most explicit elaboration to date of the principle established by the Third Review Conference in 1991.[39]

The Eighth Review Conference also identified specific institutional measures requiring further development, including the establishment of a database to

38 BWC/CONF.VIII/4, II. para. 35, reproduced in BWC/WG/4/1, Annex I, para. 3. The Eighth Review Conference formulation reads: "in view of the humanitarian imperative, the Conference encourages States Parties in a position to do so to provide timely emergency assistance, if requested pending consideration of a decision by the Security Council." This built upon the Third Review Conference understanding (1991) that timely emergency assistance "could be provided by States Parties if requested" pending a Security Council decision, itself reaffirmed at the Fourth, Sixth, and Seventh Review Conferences.

39 Lampalzer, A. and Santori, V. (2019). The operationalization of Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention: Efforts to enhance assistance capacities in response to deliberate bio-events. In Davis, I. (ed.). Verification and Implementation: A Collection of Analysis on International Agreements for Security and Development. London: VERTIC, pp. 22–35.

facilitate the matching of assistance offers with requests from States Parties. While the Final Declaration expressed support for "***the establishment of a database open to all States Parties to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII***", no accompanying decision was taken to formally establish such a database or to allocate the resources necessary for its administration and maintenance, a gap that would continue to feature prominently in subsequent discussions.[40]

1.4.2 The 2018–2020 Intersessional Programme

The 2017 Meeting of States Parties agreed an intersessional programme for the period 2018–2020 that allocated a dedicated annual two-day Meeting of Experts (MX4) to the topic of "Assistance, Response and Preparedness".[41] The programme established six substantive agenda items:[42]

- practical challenges to Article VII implementation;
- guidelines and formats for assistance requests;
- procedures for the assistance database and coordination with international organizations;
- mobile biomedical units;
- approaches to strengthening international response capabilities for infectious disease outbreaks; and
- means of addressing the possible hostile use of biological agents against agriculture, livestock, and the natural environment.

40 BWC/MSP/2018/WP.7; BWC/MSP/2020/WP.3; BWC/CONF.IX/WP.22. The paper specifically notes that paragraph 47 of the Eighth Review Conference Final Declaration "supports the establishment of a database" but that "the Conference did not take an accompanying decision to actually establish this database or to provide the resources for its maintenance."

41 BWC/MSP/2017/6, para 19 (e), p. 6.

42 The full range of proposals arising from the 2018–2020 intersessional programme is compiled in BWC/MSP/2020/INF.2, submitted by the 2020 MSP and MX Chairpersons in their personal capacity. The paper notes explicitly that this document "reflects the full range of views expressed during the meetings but does not purport to be exhaustive and it does not imply in any way agreement on any individual option."



Mr. Usman Iqbal Jadoon of Pakistan, Chair of the Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX4), 6-7 August 2019. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

Notwithstanding the extensive deliberations conducted under this intersessional programme and the numerous working papers submitted by States Parties, no common understandings were reached on any of the agenda items during the 2018—2020 intersessional period. The Chairpersons of the Meeting of Experts sessions produced summary papers, and in 2019 an Aide Mémoire compiled proposals in factual form; a Non-Paper submitted at the 2020 Meeting of States Parties[43] aggregated the full range of proposals from all three years of MX meetings. These documents were presented without agreed status and without prejudice to the positions of any delegation.[44]

Three proposals attracted the greatest degree of attention and discussion during this period:

- First, South Africa's evolving voluntary guidelines for the submission of assistance requests, refined continuously from 2014 through to the preparatory process for the Ninth Review Conference, identified three distinct pathways available to an affected State Party: the receipt of bilateral assistance from other States Parties or international organizations without invoking Article VII; the receipt of assistance from States Parties without UN Security Council

43 The 2020 BWC Meeting of States Parties was postponed due to the COVID19 pandemic. As agreed by States Parties via a silence procedure on 8 February October 2021, the Meeting of States Parties was held from 22 to 25 November 2021.

44 BWC/WG/4/1, para. 13, confirming that "no consensus could be reached on the deliberations including any possible outcomes of the Meetings of Experts" across the 2018—2020 intersessional period. The Chairpersons' summary reports for MX4 in 2018, 2019 and 2020 are at BWC/MSP/2018/MX.4/3, BWC/MSP/2019/MX.4/2 and BWC/MSP/2020/MX.4/2 respectively. The consolidated Non-Paper aggregating all proposals from the three years is BWC/MSP/2020/INF.2.

authorization, consistent with the humanitarian imperative language of the Eighth Review Conference; and the formal invocation of Article VII through a request to the Security Council. South Africa proposed specific draft language for adoption in the Final Document of the Ninth Review Conference, establishing these guidelines as a voluntary template that States Parties could utilize when submitting a formal assistance request.[45]

- Second, the proposal by France and India for the establishment of a dedicated Article VII assistance database, first advanced in 2015, had by 2021 been developed into a detailed technical blueprint. The proposed database would be established, administered, and maintained by the ISU on a secure, web-based platform accessible to all States Parties and operated separately from the existing Article X database. Its primary function would be the matching of specific assistance offers with requests. A modular approach to development was recommended in order to enable early introduction of the tool, with more sophisticated features to be implemented in subsequent phases. The possible establishment of a voluntary trust fund as a complementary mechanism was also advanced. Broad support for the proposal had accumulated over the course of the intersessional period, yet a formal decision to establish the database with dedicated resources had not been forthcoming.
- Third, the Russian Federation's proposal for the operationalization of mobile biomedical units, advanced jointly with Armenia, Belarus, and China as co-sponsors, and modelled on the Russian Federation's specialized anti-epidemic teams (SPEB), envisaged the creation of multi-purpose rapid reaction units capable of serving the Convention's objectives across three articles simultaneously: advancing international cooperation in infectious disease prevention pursuant to Article X; providing assistance and protection against biological weapons use pursuant to Article VII; and supporting investigations of alleged use pursuant to Article VI.[46] The Russian Federation and the United Kingdom also jointly elaborated a set of core elements for an effective Article VII response, addressing procedural, operational, and scientific requirements in detail.[47]

The 2018–2020 intersessional period also generated a broader range of proposals addressing systemic gaps in the current international response ar-

45 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.17. The three assistance pathways identified by South Africa are: (a) bilateral assistance without invoking Article VII; (b) assistance from States Parties without UNSC approval, consistent with the Eighth Review Conference humanitarian imperative language; and (c) formal invocation of Article VII through the UNSC.

46 BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/WP.1/Rev.2; BWC/CONF.IX/WP.12. The paper notes that the Russian Federation's specialized anti-epidemic teams (SPEB) served as the conceptual model for the mobile biomedical units proposal.

47 BWC/MSP/2018/WP.6; BWC/MSP/2019/MX.4/WP.6.

chitecture. These included, inter alia: the holding of regular exercises to test Article VII capabilities; the establishment of a voluntary trust fund to support assistance operations; a recommendation that the Secretary-General of the United Nations prepare a generic coordination plan for deliberate biological releases, potentially including the appointment of a special representative to liaise with States Parties, the ISU, the WHO, and relevant organizations; the development of a multilateral response framework encompassing States Parties, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations; and the strengthening of linkages and synergies between Article VII and Article X, with recognition that the enhancement of national disease surveillance, detection, and response capacities contributes to preparedness for deliberate bio-events.[48]

1.4.3 The Ninth Review Conference (2022)

In the preparatory process for, and at the Ninth Review Conference itself in 2022, the range of substantive proposals on Article VII was more extensive than at any previous point in the Convention's history. In addition to the three proposals that had dominated intersessional discussions, which were tabled again under new Working Papers,[49] several other delegations advanced broader proposals with direct implications for Article VII.

Kazakhstan proposed the establishment, by the Ninth Review Conference, of a Working Group to elaborate the creation of an International Agency for Biological Safety (IABS). Among the proposed functions of the IABS were the maintenance of a database of assistance types available to affected States Parties and the coordination of emergency assistance requests under Article VII.[50]

The Russian Federation proposed the establishment of an Open-Ended Working Group with a mandate to elaborate, on a consensus basis, measures and draft proposals to strengthen the Convention to be included, as appropriate, in a legally binding instrument to be submitted for the consideration of States Parties. Procedures and mechanisms for assistance and protection against biological weapons in accordance with Article VII of the Convention constituted one of the six proposed topics.[51] [52]

A broad group of European Union member and associated States affirmed their support for both the Franco-Indian assistance database and the South

48 BWC/WG/4/1, pp. 18-19.
49 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.22; BWC/CONF.IX/WP.12, and BWC/CONF.IX/WP.17.
50 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.3; BWC/WG/3/WP.2.
51 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.16, para. 1 (e).
52 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.16.

African voluntary guidelines.[53]



Ambassador Leonardo Bencini, President of the Ninth BWC Review Conference, 28 November – 16 December 2022. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

The Group of Non-Aligned Movement and Other States Parties (the NAM) advanced a notably assertive position, affirming that the provision of timely assistance in accordance with Article VII constitutes a legal obligation of States Parties, not merely a political commitment, and firmly rejecting any suggestion that national preparedness could be imposed as a precondition for either the provision or the receipt of assistance. The NAM further attributed the continuing gap in effective Article VII implementation in part to the absence of a comprehensive legally binding protocol to strengthen the Convention's implementation across all its dimensions.[54]

Argentina and Brazil introduced a further dimension with their proposal for the establishment of a BWC One Health Surveillance Network, a mechanism for direct cooperation among governmental institutions with mandates in animal, plant, and environmental surveillance for the purposes of prevention, preparedness, response, and assistance in cases of biological incidents against

53 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.37, paras 6 and 8 (d).

54 The NAM statement, delivered by Azerbaijan at the 2020 Meeting of States Parties, also affirmed that national preparedness "should not be imposed as a precondition for either provision or receipt of assistance" and attributed the continuing gap in the effective provision of Article VII assistance in part to the absence of a comprehensive Protocol to strengthen the Convention.

agriculture, livestock, and biodiversity. The Network was proposed to operate without budgetary implications for States Parties, with the costs of voluntary activities borne by participating institutions.[55]

Pakistan tabled a proposal regarding, inter alia, the establishment of an open-ended Ad Hoc Group to deliberate and identify effective measures for revitalization of the Convention in all its aspects, including measures related to preparedness, assistance and response,[56] while Panama put forward a proposal concerning the enhancement of gender equality and women's empowerment as an integral part of the institutional strengthening of the BWC, including the promotion of a gender and culturally sensitive approach in strategy for preparedness, response and assistance in the event of BWC within Article VII.[57]

Other delegations submitted papers that analyzed various aspects relating to the implementation of Article VII at the national, regional and international levels, including consideration of challenges and sharing best practices. Japan submitted three Working Papers: two presenting the outcome of a project financed by the country on "Strengthening National, Sub-Regional and International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond to the Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons",[58] and a third one, co-sponsored with the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, on strengthening cooperation among States Parties and relevant international organizations in response to deliberate spread of infectious diseases.[59] The Philippines submitted a paper on the importance of simulation and table-top exercises as a tool to enhance preparedness and response, bringing the example of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).[60] The United Kingdom circulated a Working Paper looking at the impact of advances in science and technology on the Response to the COVID-19 pandemic and relevance to Article VII.[61]

While the Ninth Review Conference was unable to find agreement on the article-by-article review part of its Final Declaration, States Parties agreed on a substantive intersessional programme for the period 2023 to 2026, including most notably the establishment of a Working Group on the Strengthening of

55 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.19. The proposed network was designed to have no budgetary implications for BWC States Parties; costs associated with voluntary activities were to be borne by the proposing State(s) and their nominated institutions.
56 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.57.
57 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.48.
58 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.41 and BWC/CONF.IX/WP.43.
59 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.64.
60 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.55.
61 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.9.

the Convention.[62]

1.5 Concluding Observations

The foregoing analysis reveals a provision whose trajectory has been defined by a persistent tension between normative aspiration and operational capacity. Article VII was included in the Convention as a late-stage restoration, a concession extended in partial compensation for the United Kingdom's acceptance of an instrument considerably less ambitious than it had sought, and stripped in the process of the procedural architecture, the investigative role of the UNSG, the automaticity of the complaints mechanism, the detailed assistance framework, that would have been required to render it functional.

The evolution documented in this chapter constitutes genuine progress. The recognition at the Third Review Conference that pre-UNSC humanitarian assistance is permissible; the extension of the provision's scope to non-state actor violations at the Sixth Review Conference; the acknowledgement at the Seventh Review Conference that preparedness and response obligations apply regardless of the cause of an outbreak; the articulation at the Eighth Review Conference of a "***humanitarian imperative***" as the basis for prompt emergency action; and the progressive elaboration, over two decades of intersessional work, of detailed procedural, institutional, and operational proposals - all of this represents a substantive development of the treaty regime well beyond what the bare text of Article VII would have permitted one to anticipate.

What remains deficient is the conversion of these accumulated understandings and proposals into operational reality. No agreed procedure for the submission of an assistance request has been formally adopted to date. No common evidentiary standard has been established for the purposes of the Security Council's determination. The assistance database, notwithstanding broad support among States Parties spanning more than a decade, has not been established. The inability of the Ninth Review Conference to approve specific recommendations on Article VII leaves even the most mature and consensually supported proposals in a state of suspension.

The fundamental structural observation made by Sims[63] at the turn of the millennium retains its validity: Article VII is the least substantial of the Convention's original compliance elements, and despite the most intensive period of deliberation in the Convention's history, the distance between its normative

62 BWC/CONF.IX/9, para 8.

63 Sims, N. A. (2001). The Evolution of Biological Disarmament. SIPRI Chemical & Biological Warfare Studies, vol. 19. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 60.

commitment and operational preparedness has not been bridged. The Working Group established by the Ninth Review Conference, with its mandate to develop specific and effective measures, including possible legally binding ones, represents the first formal multilateral process since the collapse of the Ad Hoc Group negotiations in 2001 that is structurally capable of addressing this gap. The question that States Parties continue to confront is whether that process will prove capable of generating the agreements and resource allocations that Article VII's effective operationalization would require or whether the provision will continue to express, as it has since 1975, an undertaking of solidarity for which the implementing mechanisms remain to be established. The next Chapter looks in more detail at the Working Group's efforts to develop recommendations that would strengthen the Convention in all its aspects, including in the area of assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII.

2. THE QUESTION OF THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF ARTICLE VII IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CONVENTION

2.1 Introduction: The Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention (2023–2026)

The adoption of a final consensus document at the BWC Ninth Review Conference represented a rare success for multilateralism and, especially, for disarmament, in 2022. At the Review Conference, States Parties agreed to establish a new substantive intersessional programme for the period from 2023 to 2026. Its centrepiece is the 'Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention', open to all States Parties and mandated to "*identify, examine and develop specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, and to make recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the Convention in all its aspects, to be submitted to States Parties for consideration and any further action.*"[64] Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, welcomed the successful outcome of the Conference as "*a glimmer of hope in an overall bleak international security environment.*"[65]

The Working Group represents a paradigm shift in the evolution of the BWC with a clear focus on developing specific and effective measures and making recommendations to be submitted to States Parties for further action. In establishing the Working Group, the States Parties declared themselves determined to "*strengthen the effectiveness and to improve the implementation of the Convention in all its aspects*".[66] The measures that the Working Group was mandated to develop are to be "*formulated and designed in a manner that their implementation supports international cooperation, scientific research and economic and technological development, avoiding any negative impacts.*"[67] States Parties also agreed that the Working Group will meet for 15

64 BWC/CONF.IX/9*, dated 22 December 2022. II.B. para. 8, establishing the Working Group.
65 UN Press Release. Secretary-General. Statement, dated 16.12.2022. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3997707
66 Id.
67 Id.

days annually in Geneva to consider seven specific topics:[68]

a. Measures on international cooperation and assistance under Article X;

b. Measures on scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention;

c. Measures on confidence-building and transparency;

d. Measures on compliance and verification;

e. Measures on national implementation of the Convention;

f. Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII;

g. Measures on organizational, institutional and financial arrangements.

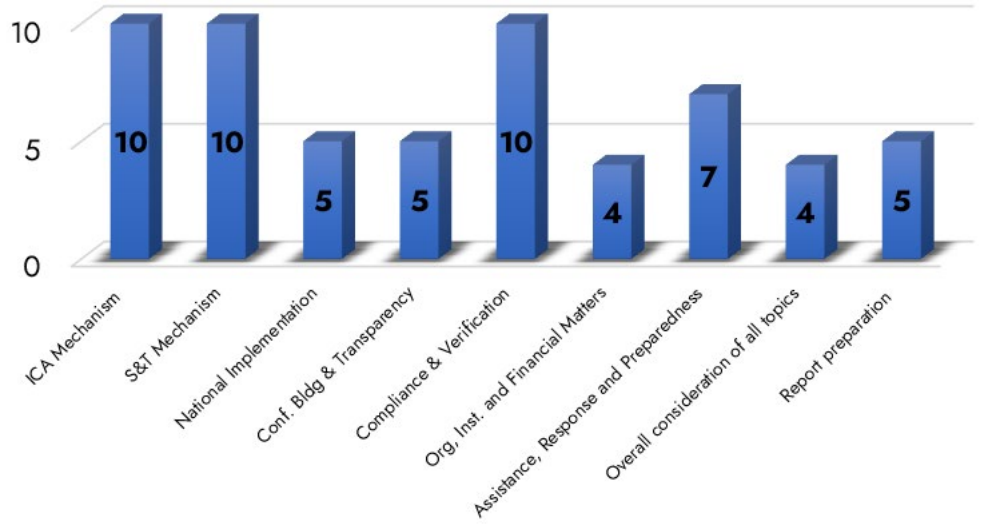


Chart 1: Distribution of the allocated days per Working Group topic

The Working Group was mandated to complete its work as soon as possible, preferably by the end of 2025. A consensus report is to be submitted to the Tenth Review Conference in 2027 or to a Special Conference to be convened earlier. By decision of the Ninth Review Conference, the establishment of the Working Group is without prejudice to the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group whose negotiations on a draft legally-binding protocol came to an abrupt stop in 2001.[69]

68 Id.
69 BWC/CONF.IX/9*, II.B. para. 8.

From 15 to 16 March 2023, States Parties convened in Geneva for the first session of the Working Group session, which focused on procedural and organizational matters. Laying the groundwork for the subsequent substantive Working Group sessions, agreement was reached on multiple aspects, including the agenda and an indicative schedule of activities from 2023 to 2026. The meeting also elected Ambassador Flavio Soares Damico of Brazil as the Chairperson, as well as Ambassador Camille Petit of France and Mr. Irakli Jgenti of Georgia as its Vice-Chairs for the period 2023-2024.[70]



Ambassador Flavio Soares Damico of Brazil, Chairperson of the Working Group from March 2023 to June 2024. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

Since then, there has been turnover among some of the officeholders. In August 2024, Ambassador Frederico Duque Estrada Meyer of Brazil was elected Chair of the Working Group in view of Ambassador Damico's appointment to a new position.[71] Likewise, Ambassador Anne Lazar Sury of France took over the role of Vice Chair from Ambassador Petit in September 2025, who was also appointed to a new position.[72] The continuation of the mandate of these office holders was confirmed via a silence procedure for the period 2025-2026.[73]

Since the Working Group's early stages of activity, the Chair has engaged in

70 BWC/WG/1/2, 07 July 2023.

71 In view of his appointment to a new position, Ambassador Damico gave notice of his resignation as Chairperson of the Working Group. See letter sent by the BWC ISU to all States Parties and Signatories, dated 24 June 2024.

72 See letter sent by the BWC ISU to all States Parties and Signatories, dated 5 September 2024.

73 See letter sent by the BWC ISU to all States Parties and Signatories, dated 24 January 2025.

regional and cross-regional, as well as bilateral and informal consultations to prepare and sustain the discussions in the context of the formal sessions of work. During initial consultations, the Chairperson recorded a "***broad support*** (...) ***to the notion that the mandate established by the Review Conference should be fulfilled in a 'member-driven' process***."[74] Overall, over twenty open-ended informal consultations – both in person and in hybrid format – have been held by the Chair regularly in between the formal sessions of the Working Group to advance discussions.

To support this approach, which requires the engagement of all delegations, the Chair appointed facilitators ("Friends of the Chair") from across the various regional groups for each of the seven substantive topics to be addressed by the Working Group. They have provided critical support to the Chair in engaging with delegations and advancing the Working Group's mandate, including by preparing non-papers on the seven topics. Moreover, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) has organized a series of seven informal webinars in close collaboration with the BWC ISU and the office holders, which also helped to address crucial issues under consideration by the Working Group.



Webinar held by UNIDIR on Verification of the BWC, 29 September 2023. Photo credit: UNIDIR.

In the Working Group's early sessions, the Chair invited a range of panellists from several relevant international organizations and individual experts from

74 See Letter from the Chairperson of the Working Group and the BWC ISU to the States Parties in preparation for the Second Session of the Working Group dated 23 May 2023.

academia to provide substantive briefings to delegations and facilitate the identification of transferable lessons for the BWC. In addition, the BWC ISU provided briefings on its activities related to the Working Group's mandated topics and prepared two background papers on confidence-building and transparency measures and on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII.

From 21 to 22 November 2024, the Chair convened an informal retreat in Montreux, Switzerland, facilitated by Wilton Park and held with the support of France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as Open Philanthropy. Its aim was to advance efforts within the Working Group by advocating an 'early harvest' through the provisional establishment of the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) and Science and Technology (S&T) mechanisms from 2025 to 2027 with focused mandates to accelerate discussions on compliance and verification. These mechanisms were to be approved by a Special Review Conference convened in 2025. Subsequently, the Tenth Review Conference to be held in 2027 would allow States Parties to recalibrate their provisional mandates based on efficacy and evolving needs.



BWC Retreat in Montreux, Switzerland, 21-22 November 2024. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

While discussions at the fifth session of the Working Group in December 2024 on this widely supported proposal advanced, consensus eventually remained elusive. At the same time, the Chair was determined to maintain the

momentum that had built over the past year. In his letter to all States Parties dated 13 February 2025, Ambassador Meyer stressed that "[*m*]*ore than ever, we must focus on achieving substantive results from our work. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Biological Weapons Convention and there will be a number of events taking place to mark this important milestone. More attention will be focused on our work and we must therefore step up and demonstrate that we are engaged in a serious effort to strengthen the Convention.* "[75]

Accordingly, efforts within the Working Group shifted to a new phase. Whereas 2023 and 2024 were largely focused on 'identifying and examining' measures, 2025 marked a transition towards 'developing' recommendations.[76] In pursuit of this objective, the Chair issued a non-paper on 6 May 2025, developed in consultation with the Vice-Chairs, based on input from the Friends of the Chair, and with assistance from the BWC ISU. The document drew upon proposals submitted by States Parties to the Working Group at its first five sessions held in 2023 and 2024. The non-paper, which represented a compendium of "***possible elements***", did not purport "***to be exhaustive***", nor did it "***imply agreement on any individual measure suggested***."[77] On 20 May 2025, Ambassador Meyer introduced the non-paper at open-ended informal consultations. Following extensive feedback from States Parties, he circulated a revised version of the document, further developed as a rolling text, on 28 July 2025.[78] The document then served as the key document for discussion during the sixth session of the Working Group in August 2025.

In light of the mandate from the Ninth Review Conference that the Working Group should complete its work "as soon as possible, preferably before the end of 2025", the Chair further intensified efforts in autumn 2025. At open-ended informal consultations held on 3 October 2025, Ambassador Meyer presented a draft of the final report of the Working Group in the hope that States Parties could consider and adopt it at the seventh session

75 See letter from the Chairperson of the Working Group, dated 13 February 2025.

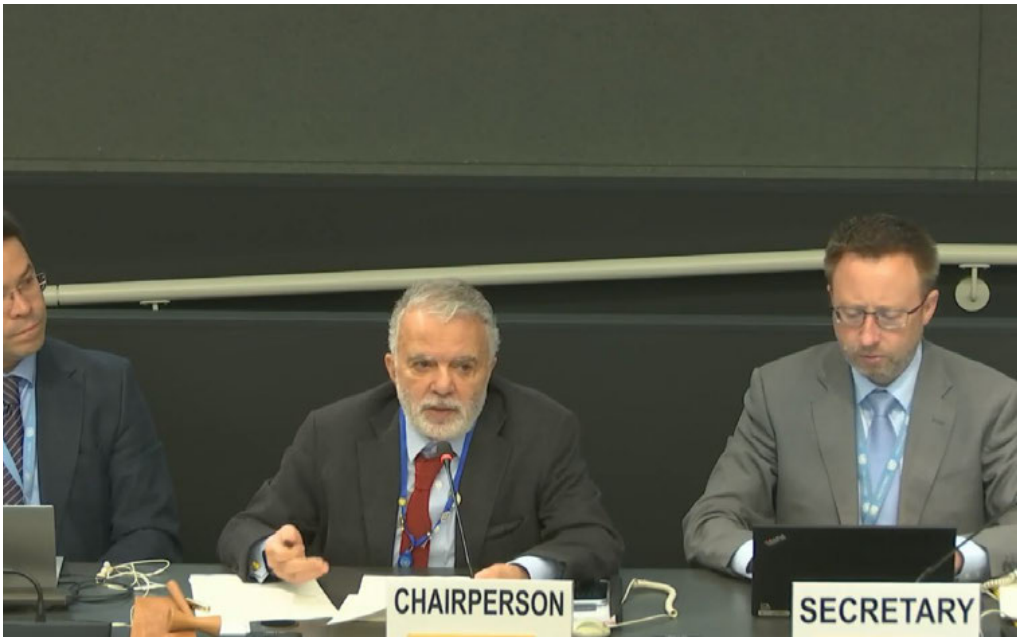
76 See letter from the Chairperson of the Working Group, dated 4 April 2025.

77 Non-paper by the Chairperson, Vice-Chairs and Friends of the Chair of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention. Possible elements of specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, to strengthen and institutionalize the Biological Weapons Convention in all its aspects. 6 May 2025.

78 Rolling Text by the Chairperson of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention. Draft specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, to strengthen and institutionalize the Biological Weapons Convention in all its aspects. 28 July 2025. The document was subsequently presented as BWC/WG/6/CRP.1, dated 7 August 2025 to the Sixth Session of the Working Group from 11 to 22 August 2025.

of the Working Group in December. The first version of the draft final report consisted of the main document and four Annexes: Annex I represented a revised version of the "rolling text" discussed at the sixth Working Group in August 2025, whereas Annexes II and III carried the draft decisions to establish the ICA and S&T Mechanisms, respectively. Annex IV contained the Working Group's list of documents. Taking into account feedback received at monthly open-ended informal consultations held throughout autumn, the Chair submitted a revised and slightly restructured version of the document to the seventh session of the Working Group session on 1 December 2025.

Proceedings at the seventh session of the Working Group in December 2025 focused on negotiating the draft final report. While some progress was made and delegations demonstrated a constructive spirit, the proceedings also highlighted that more time would be required to reach consensus on the report. By the close of the meeting, around half of the draft final report was marked in green, indicating that the text had been agreed ad referendum.[79]



Amb. Meyer, Chair of the Working Group addressing delegations at its Seventh Session, 8-12 December 2025. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

Procedural objections by one State Party led to the shortening of the 2025 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) to one day. However, the MSP did decide to reconvene for an early session of the Working Group in February 2026,

79 See Daily Report BioWeapons Prevention Project. Report 2025-18. Monday 15 December 2025. https://www.cbw-events.org.uk/BWC25-18.pdf.

to maintain momentum in the Working Group deliberations. Furthermore, in view of the organizational arrangements and related payments already made for the two remaining days of the MSP, States Parties requested Ambassador Meyer to hold informal consultations to make further progress with the draft final report.[80]

Negotiations on the document resumed from where they left off at the Working Group session, with the BWC ISU issuing an informal revised draft of the final report on 17 December 2025. Additionally, the BWC ISU circulated projected cost estimates for activities derived from the recommended measures, as well as proposals to establish an International Cooperation and Assistance Mechanism and a Science and Technology Review Mechanism.[81]

2026 began with a series of open-ended, informal consultations held by the Chair in January and early February ahead of the eighth session of the Working Group from 9 to 13 February 2026.82 In a letter dated 13 January 2026, Ambassador Meyer outlined his approach for the upcoming Working Group session. Additionally, he reiterated the urgency of the Group's work: "*Strengthening the BWC now is not only a technical necessity but a strategic imperative to prevent future risks arising from accelerating developments in science and technology and to demonstrate the continued relevance of multilateralism. Ultimately, our goal is to safeguard international peace and security. Strengthening the BWC is a concrete expression of that commitment. And it is within our reach this year*."[83]

Proceedings at the eighth session in February 2026 followed a similar approach to that already adopted during the seventh session. To make the best use of time, the Chair followed a rolling agenda approach. Additionally, no regional or national statements were delivered, and all available time was devoted to the Working Group's revised draft final report of the Working Group.

As already successfully implemented at the seventh session, BWC ISU staff in the Secretariat adopted a colour-coding scheme to mark progress on the draft final report:

- Text agreed ad referendum at earlier sessions was highlighted in green;
- Text that was agreed during the open-ended informal consultations was high-

80 A revised version of the draft final report was circulated as BWC/WG/7/CRP.1/Rev.1, dated 12 December 2025.
81 Projected cost estimates were based on document. BWC/WG/7/CRP.1.
82 See letter by the Chairperson, dated 13 January 2026.
83 See letter by the Chairperson, dated 13 January 2026.

lighted in yellow;

- Proposals made by States Parties during the consultations were shown in square brackets; and
- Text yet to be agreed remained without colour.

The Chair also implemented a prioritized approach towards addressing the remaining elements of the text:

- First, review the yellow highlighted text agreed during the open-ended informal consultations with the expectation to quickly agree and to turn these sections into green-highlighted text;
- Second, present text that was consulted with a range of interested States Parties and which seems to be agreeable to them in the hope of turning those sections also into green-highlighted text; and
- Third, turn attention to any issues still open and text requiring further work.



Negotiations during the Eighth Session of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the BWC, 9-13 February 2026. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

Overall, the Working Group has made considerable progress since its first session in March 2023. About 70 per cent of the draft final report's text, issued following its Eighth Session in February 2026, has been agreed "ad referendum" and appears "in green" in the document.84 Since then, the Chair has held several open-ended informal sessions to further narrow down the areas where convergence has yet to be achieved.

84 BWC/WG/9/CRP.1, dated 24 April 2026.

The penultimate ninth session of the Working Group will take place from 17 to 21 August 2026 and the final tenth session is scheduled from 7 to 11 December 2026. However, some challenges remain ahead, as discussed later in this Chapter. Much is at stake for States Parties to conclude their work successfully in December 2026. Ambassador Leonardo Bencini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament and President of the Ninth Review Conference in 2022, described the situation as follows:" *If a biological weapon were to be used tomorrow, we would be caught completely unprepared. The world would look at us and would ask: What have you done to prevent this? All the more reason to act now and complete the work we started at the Ninth Review Conference. If we succeed – as we must – that Conference will have been more than 'a glimmer of hope'*".[85]

2.2 The discussions within the Working Group regarding assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII

Of the sixty days originally allocated to substantive discussions within the Working Group across the period 2023 to 2026, the topic of assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII was allocated a total of seven days, spread across four sessions: three days at the fourth session (August 2024); one day at the fifth session (December 2024); two days at the seventh session (December 2025); and one day at the ninth session (August 2026). This allocation reflected Article VII's continued status as one of the Working Group's higher-priority topics.

Discussions on Article VII within the Working Group did not start from scratch. On the contrary, and as highlighted in Chapter II, States Parties could draw on a rich body of work and consider proposals that have been discussed and matured in previous intersessional work programmes, with several of them also addressed during the last two Review Conferences.

In the course of the Working Group, States Parties submitted the following six Working Papers focusing on Article VII-related issues:

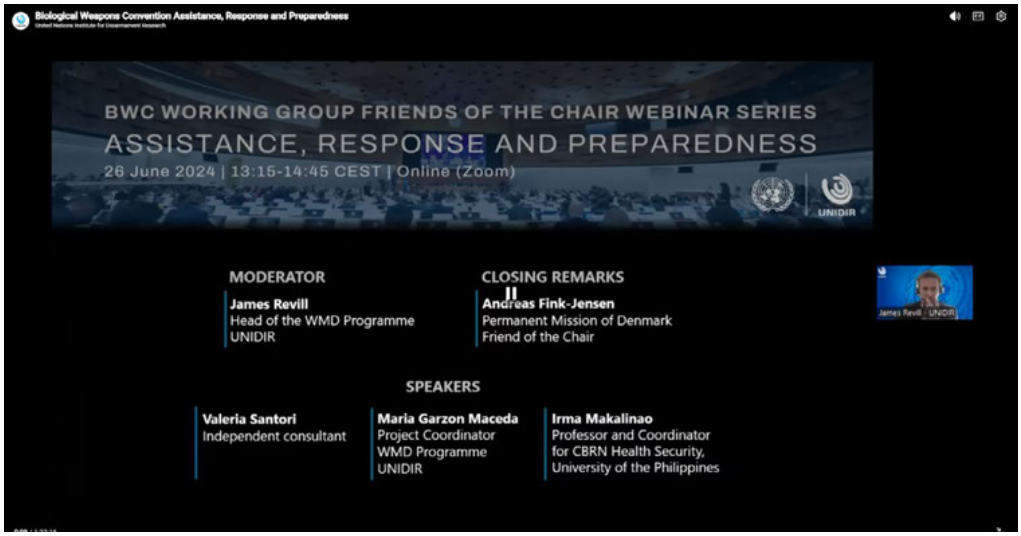
85 Ambassador Leonardo Bencini. How will the Ninth Review Conference be remembered and what impact has it had on future meetings under the BWC? In UNODA: The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty. Codifying 100 years of efforts to combat biological warfare. P. 22. https://media-publications.unoda.org/documents/BWC_at_Fifty.pdf

State Party	Working Paper
South Africa	BWC/WG/4/WP.1: Implementation of Article VII
Russian Federation	BWC/WG/4/WP.2: Strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: Creating and using mobile biomedical units to deliver protection against biological weapons, investigate the alleged use of such weapons, and to suppress epidemics of various etiology
United States of America. Co-sponsored by Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	BWC/WG/4/WP.3/Rev.1: Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII
France and India	BWC/WG/4/WP.4: Proposal for the establishment of a database for assistance under Article VII of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	BWC/WG/4/WP.5: UK Capabilities Relevant to Implementation and Operationalisation of Article VII of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

Submitted by the Member States of the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden)	BWC/WG/5/WP.16: Position of the European Union and its Member States on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII of the Convention

The fourth session of the Working Group in August 2024 was the first opportunity to address issues related to assistance, response, and preparedness. Well ahead of the session, the Friends of the Chair – Mr Ángel G. Dalmazzo (Argentina), Secretary of the Embassy/Permanent Mission of the Argentine Republic to the International Organisations in Geneva and Mr Andreas Fink-Jensen, Disarmament & Tech Advisor at the Permanent Mission of (Denmark) to the UN in Geneva – held several informal consultations. Between April and August 2024, they met with all regional groups, and they also carried out several bilateral consultations.

The Friends of the Chair, together with UNIDIR and the BWC ISU, also organized an informal webinar on 26 June 2024 on wider trends in assistance, response, and preparedness, as well as national and regional capabilities, including practical exercises. The event aimed to stimulate thinking and discussion on the topic of assistance, response and preparedness during the intersessional period and consisted of an expert panel followed by a moderated question-and-answer session with the audience.



UNIDIR webinar on Assistance, Response and Preparedness, 26 June 2024, Photo credit: UNIDIR.

On 17 July 2024, the Friends of the Chair circulated, in their personal capacity, a non-paper to support the discussions during the fourth session of the Working Group. The document also served as an informal stocktaking of past discussions and concrete proposals presented by States Parties, which are briefly summarized below. The document presented general aspects of Article VII and captured key elements from more recent discussions and proposals from past BWC meetings. Additionally, the non-paper set out some guiding questions relating to the implementation of Article VII for delegations' consideration alongside three main topics:[86]

- The role of international organizations;
- Cross-cutting issues; and
- Concrete proposals to strengthen the implementation of Article VII.

The non-paper identified the following key proposals:

i) The establishment of an international institutional mechanism under the BWC to use mobile biomedical units with the following objectives: *"(a) advancement of international co-operation for prevention of infectious disease pursuant to Article X; (b) provision of assistance and delivery of protection against biological weapons pursuant to Article VII; (c) investigation of alleged use of biological weapons pursuant to Article VI."*[87]

86 Friends of the Chair. Non-paper. Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII. Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention. 17 July 2024.
87 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.12, dated 7 November 2022.

ii) The development of "*a set of voluntary guidelines to assist a State Party when submitting a request or application for assistance*.[88]

iii) The establishment of a "*network that would encompass some of the main governmental institutions of the BWC States Parties that work on the protection of agriculture, livestock and biodiversity against biological threats*" aiming at being "*a mechanism for direct dialogue, mutual support, joint-projects and exchange of best practices among animal, plant and environmental surveillance services, security and law enforcement agencies, laboratories, and other governmental institutions*."[89]

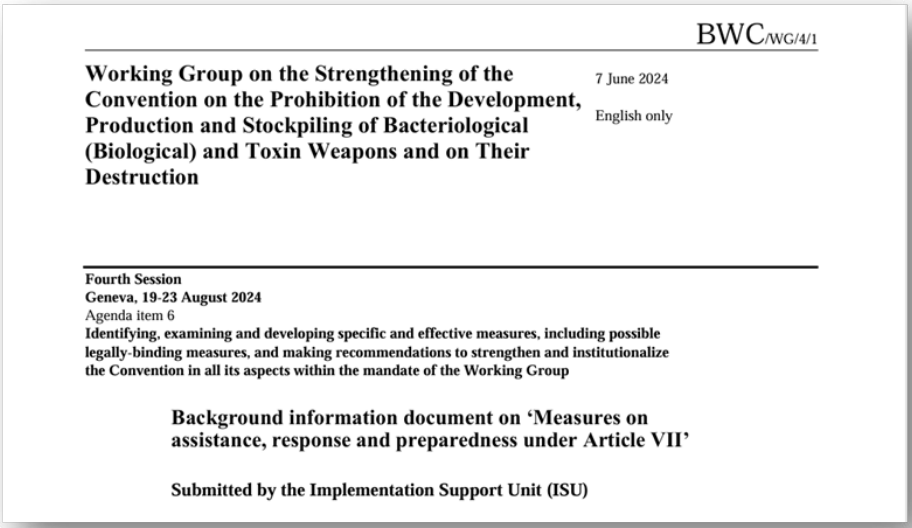
iv) The development and establishment of a database under Article VII. Such a database, to be administered and maintained by the BWC ISU, should be hosted "*on a secure web-based platform, open to all States Parties and to be hosted on the BTWC ISU website. The purpose of a database on Article VII would be solely to implement Article VII of the BTWC and allow matching specific offers and requests for assistance*".[90] In the final document of the Eighth Review Conference States Parties supported "*the establishment of a database open to all States Parties to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII. The purpose of this database could be one way to help implement Article VII of the Convention and allow matching specific offers and requests for assistance.*"[91] However, the Conference did not adopt a corresponding decision to establish this database or to provide the resources for its maintenance.

As noted in the non-paper of the Friends of the Chair on Article VII, discussions among States Parties also revolved around the possible benefits of practical exercises to ensure States Parties' readiness to respond to events and to deliver assistance in case of BW use, the means of increasing cooperation and information-sharing, at the local, national, and international levels to prepare for and respond to naturally occurring and intentional threats to agriculture, livestock, or the environment, and as to the relationship and synergies with Article X, from the perspective of strengthening surveillance, detection and response capabilities of national health systems.

In preparation of the discussions on assistance, response and preparedness at the fourth session of the Working Group, the BWC ISU prepared a background document consolidating the full record of additional understandings

88 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.17, dated 8 November 2022.
89 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.19, dated 14 November 2022.
90 BWC/CONF.IX/WP.22, dated 16 November 2022.
91 BWC/CONF.VIII/4, Part II, paragraph 47.

and agreements reached at Review Conferences and common understandings reached during previous intersessional programmes, together with an updated account of BWC ISU activities on the topic.[92]



BWC/WG/4/1

Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

7 June 2024

English only

Fourth Session
Geneva, 19-23 August 2024
Agenda item 6
Identifying, examining and developing specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, and making recommendations to strengthen and institutionalize the Convention in all its aspects within the mandate of the Working Group

Background information document on 'Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII'

Submitted by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU)

ISU Background Information Document: BWC/WG/4/1, dated 7 June 2024

As per practice adopted for the second and third sessions of the Working Group sessions, the Chair also invited representatives from five relevant international organizations (International Atomic Energy Agency - IAEA, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons - OPCW, World Health Organization - WHO, the World Organization for Animal Health - WOAH, the International Plant Protection Convention - IPPC Secretariat/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO) to participate in a panel session and provide briefings on activities within their mandates in order to draw transferable lessons for the BWC.

92 BWC/WG/4/1, dated 7 June 2024: Background information document on 'Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII'. Submitted by the BWC ISU.



Panel session with international organizations on assistance, response and preparedness, fourth session of the Working Group, 19 August 2024. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

Thereafter, States Parties introduced their Working Papers. The ensuing interactive discussions largely focused on the following three longstanding proposals:

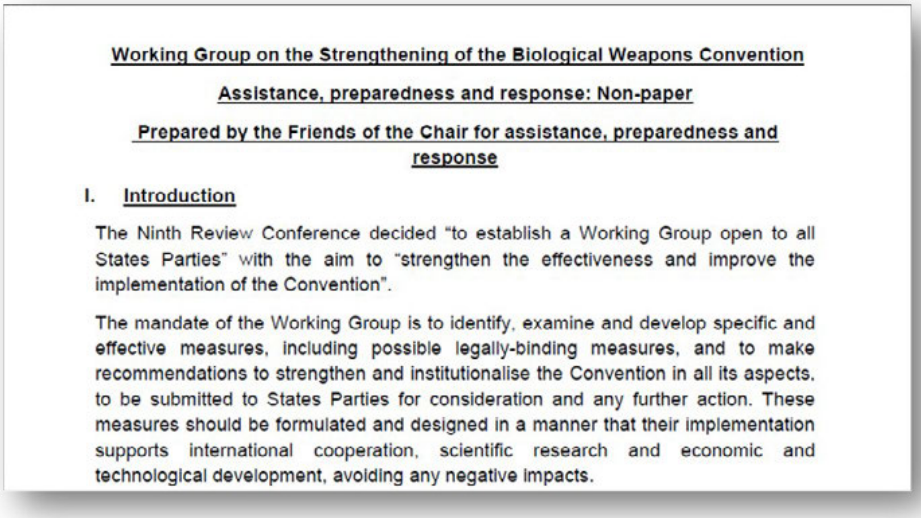
- South Africa's proposal for voluntary guidelines;[93]
- France and India's proposal for an Article VII database;[94] and
- Russia's proposal on mobile biomedical units[95].

Furthermore, States Parties' deliberations also addressed, *inter alia*, issues in relation to the role of the Security Council, the delivery of emergency assistance pending a Security Council decision, the linkages between Article VII and X, including the need to strengthen national preparedness capacities in States Parties, the importance of knowledge sharing, considerations in relation to a dedicated fund for assistance, the benefit of regular simulation and tabletop exercises, and the importance of coordination with relevant international organizations. During the two-and-a-half-day discussions on assistance, response, and preparedness, in both formal and informal settings, over 60 delegations took the floor, making interventions or delivering national or regional group statements. In the afternoon of 20 August 2024, the Friends of the Chair, circulated their non-paper dated 17 July 2024, offering guidance on

93 BWC/WG/4/WP.1.
94 BWC/WG/4/WP.4.
95 BWC/WG/4/WP.2.

the discussions. They also presented slides summarizing the key points from earlier discussions on assistance under Article VII. The sessions focused on "assistance for response" and "assistance for preparedness".

In preparation for the Article VII-related discussions at the fifth session of the Working Group session in December 2024, the Friends of the Chair issued another non-paper dated 29 November 2024. This document contained six 'possible measures for development and recommendations for consideration and further action by States Parties'. As pointed out by the Friends of the Chair, "the proposed recommendations aim to address the diverse perspectives expressed during consultations and propose a pragmatic, step-by-step approach, focusing initially on partial measures that can form the foundation for future progress."[96] In fact, and reflecting the Friends of the Chairs' comprehensive and all-inclusive approach, the document captured all the proposals that were eventually agreed ad referendum.



Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention

Assistance, preparedness and response: Non-paper

Prepared by the Friends of the Chair for assistance, preparedness and response

I. Introduction

The Ninth Review Conference decided "to establish a Working Group open to all States Parties" with the aim to "strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention".

The mandate of the Working Group is to identify, examine and develop specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, and to make recommendations to strengthen and institutionalise the Convention in all its aspects, to be submitted to States Parties for consideration and any further action. These measures should be formulated and designed in a manner that their implementation supports international cooperation, scientific research and economic and technological development, avoiding any negative impacts.

Non-Paper by the Friends of the Chair on Assistance, Response and Preparedness, dated 29 November 2024

In line with the rolling agenda approach adopted by the Chair, States Parties addressed Article VII-related discussions on the first half-day of the fifth session of the Working Group session on 2 December 2024. Building on the non-paper issued by the Friends of the Chair ahead of the session, discussions again revolved again around the key proposals already presented at the

96 Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention. Assistance, preparedness and response: Non-paper. Prepared by the Friends of the Chair for assistance, preparedness and response. 29 November 2024.

fourth session in August 2024.



Discussions at the fifth session of the Working Group, 11-22 August 2025. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

2.2.1 Advancing the Working Group discussions through a non-paper with draft elements of possible measures

Taking into consideration the discussions at the fourth and fifth Working Group sessions, and various informal consultations held by the Chair and his Friends of the Chair, Ambassador Meyer circulated on 6 May 2025 a non-paper with "Possible elements of specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, to strengthen and institutionalize the Biological Weapons Convention in all its aspects".[97]

With respect to assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII, the document covered nine measures:[98]

- It recognized that assistance - for both response and preparedness - can be provided through different formats and procedures;
- It recommended that National Contact Points also serve as focal points on assistance matters;

97 Non-paper by the Chairperson, Vice-Chairs and Friends of the Chair of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention. Possible elements of specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, to strengthen and institutionalize the Biological Weapons Convention in all its aspects. 06 May 2025.

98 A verbatim record of the nine proposed measures in the non-paper can be found in the table "Comparison of Section F across the Chair's Non-Paper, Rolling Text and Draft Final Reports" at the end of this Chapter.

- It also called for strengthened capacity-building, highlighting the linkages and synergies with Article X, on the premise that improved national surveillance, detection, and response capabilities serve both naturally occurring disease outbreaks and deliberate bio-events;
- It encouraged States Parties to consider simulations and tabletop exercises at the national, regional and international levels, involving a broad range of stakeholders;
- It recommended the adoption of voluntary guidelines that a State Party could use as a template when requesting assistance under Article VII;
- It further proposed exploring the role of the Security Council, including the information that should accompany a request and the procedures that might inform its decision-making;
- It proposed establishing an Article VII database;
- It also proposed establishing a registry of deployable capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams and mobile laboratories, together with consideration of a mechanism for timely deployment; and
- It called for continuing to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations, and a possible coordinating role for the United Nations, as well as referring specifically to the capacities of the WHO, WOAH, FAO and IPPC.

2.2.2 Taking the next step: the formulation of a Rolling Text with draft recommendations

Taking into account extensive feedback received from States Parties, the Rolling Text of 28 July 2025 carried forward the substance of the Chair's non-paper of 6 May 2025 while recasting each measure as a formal recommendation of the Working Group. As noted by the Chair in his letter dated 28 July, "With your help, I have strived to strike a careful balance between ambition and prudence. The text seeks to reflect, as faithfully as possible, the feedback from States Parties while adhering to a constructive logic of convergence. It does not attempt to erase difference, but rather to shape language that might hold the promise of consensus."[99]

With respect to assistance, response and preparedness aspects, the Rolling Text reduced the nine measures from the non-paper to eight. The following

99 Letter by the Chair of the Working Group, dated 28 July 2025. The Rolling Text was subsequently issued as BWC/WG/6/CRP.1, dated 7 August 2025 for the Sixth Session of the Working Group from 11 to 22 August 2025.

narrative traces that evolution paragraph by paragraph:[100]

- The rolling text reproduced the first measure from the non-paper verbatim, recognizing that assistance for both response and preparedness can be provided under different formats and procedures;
- The second measure, recommending that National Contact Points also serve as focal points for assistance, response and preparedness, was likewise unchanged;
- The third measure, on strengthening capacity-building, was refined. Where the non-paper spoke of identifying the linkages and synergies with Article X, the rolling text added the word "differences" alongside linkages and synergies, and it broadens the scope from outbreaks of a natural origin to those of a "natural or accidental" origin;
- While the substance of the fourth measure concerning exercises had essentially been preserved, some slight editing was done. The non-paper's broader reference to conducting exercises "such as simulations and tabletop exercises" was narrowed to "simulation and tabletop exercises," and the closing idea that lessons learned may be shared as a confidence-building measure was reformulated as sharing lessons learned to facilitate preparedness among States Parties;
- The fifth measure on voluntary guidelines had been streamlined with some adjustments made. The rolling text consolidated the language from the non-paper and began with the recommendation to adopt the guidelines before presenting its rationale;
- The sixth measure on the role of the Security Council attempted to provide further clarity by separating proposals covered in the non-paper in a single dense sentence into two clearer ones in the rolling text: the first addressed the information that should be submitted to the Council with a request for assistance, the second encouraged consideration of procedures that may inform the Council's decision-making under Article VII;
- The most significant transformation concerned the seventh measure on the database and the registry of deployable capabilities. Whereas the non-paper had presented these as separate suggestions for establishment and also proposed considering a mechanism for timely deployment, the rolling text merged them into one recommendation. It also tasked the BWC ISU to create a database, integrated the registry of deployable capabilities into that data-

100 A verbatim record of the eight recommendations in the Rolling Text can be found in the table "Comparison of Section F across the Chair's Non-Paper, Rolling Text and Draft Final Reports" at the end of this Chapter.

base, and anchored the whole in the decision of the Eighth Review Conference. The earlier proposed consideration of a deployment mechanism was not retained. The recommendation was amended by stressing that any offers are voluntary in nature and operated and funded by the nominating States Parties;

- Finally, the eighth measure on cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations - including the explicit references to the WHO, WOAH, FAO and IPPC - was carried over without amendment.



Interventions by delegations during the sixth session of the Working Group, 11-22 August 2025. Photo credit: BWC ISU.

2.2.3 Moving to the final stage: The development of Draft Recommendations

The draft final report of the Working Group issued on 1 October 2025 built directly on the rolling text of 28 July 2025. In his remarks delivered at the open-ended informal consultations on 3 October 2025, the Chair introduced the document and explained the revisions made. With respect to Section F on assistance, response and preparedness, Ambassador Meyer noted that "*there was quite widespread support for much of this section during the sixth session of the Working Group. There are several well-developed and mature proposals that have been incorporated into this section, which have been discussed for many years. On the Article VII database, we even 'supported' its creation at the Eighth Review Conference back in 2016, but we failed to instruct the ISU to provide any resources. Almost ten years later, we cannot keep on de-*

laying the implementation of our decisions. We have streamlined some paragraphs in this section as well, and made it clear that States Parties do not have a role to play in decision-making by the Security Council. In some cases, we have also cross-referenced the language proposed with that from previous Review Conferences to make sure we do not dilute previous agreements. The text preserves broad support for voluntary guidelines and a clearing-house function and links these to the ICA architecture, while capturing concerns about duplication with health-mandated bodies. Language on deployable capacities is recast as a registry fed through the Article VII database rather than as a stand-alone new structure."

The following summary traces the changes measure by measure:[101]

- The first two measures - recognizing that assistance can be provided under different formats and procedures, and recommending that National Contact Points also serve as focal points - were carried over without substantive change, subject only to the shift from the Working Group framing to the "should" formulation.
- On the third measure, two clarifying refinements were made to the rolling text that did not alter the substance: It made explicitly reference to "***identifying the differences, linkages and synergies between Article VII and Article X***", where the rolling text referred only to "***Article X***", and it replaced "deliberate bio-events" with "***deliberate biological events***."
- The fourth measure, on exercises, was reoriented toward national capacities. Whereas the rolling text recommended that States Parties should "***consider the feasibility of conducting simulation and tabletop exercises at the national, regional, and international level***", the draft final report "'***encouraged them to continue conducting' national, regional or international simulation and tabletop exercises in their national capacities***". The list of stakeholders in the exercises was tightened from "***all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and civil society***" to "***government agencies, regional and international organizations, and civil society***". Some refinement was also done in the last sentence by using more assertive language and emphasizing that any lessons learned "***should***" be shared widely among "***all***" States Parties.
- The voluntary guidelines saw some adjustments, with language made more concise and specific reference made to the UN Security Council. The draft final report clarified that the voluntary guidelines could be used as a tem-

101 A verbatim record of the eight recommendations in the Draft Final can be found in the table "Comparison of Section F across the Chair's Non-Paper, Rolling Text and Draft Final Reports" at the end of this Chapter.

plate "for ***the information that should be submitted to the UN Security Council with a request for assistance [...].***"

- The recommendation on further exploring the role of the Security Council, and considering procedures that may inform the Security Council's decision-making under Article VII underwent the most consequential change and was removed in its entirety from the draft final report.
- The recommendation on the Article VII database was reinforced. Both texts recalled the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to task and resource the Implementation Support Unit to create the database. However, the draft final report added that the BWC ISU should also "***maintain***" it and specified a funding basis - assessed and voluntary contributions received from States Parties. The elaboration on the registry of deployable capabilities was expanded to include "***equipment, training***" alongside the existing categories.
- The recommended measure on cooperation and synergies was qualified in the draft final report. Where the Rolling Text had referred broadly to cooperation with organizations and the possible coordinating role of the United Nations, the draft added that such cooperation should take into account the organizations' "respective mandates" and that the United Nations' coordinating role is exercised "under the Convention." It also referred to the efforts and capacities of "States Parties" rather than "Member States," while preserving the references to the WHO, WOAH, FAO and IPPC.

Upon issuance of the first version of the draft final report on 1 October 2025, the Chair convened hybrid informal, open-ended consultations on 3 October, 7 and 13 November 2025. Taking into account the feedback at the consultations and written comments received in writing from a number of delegations, the Chair issued another version of the draft final report as BWC/WG/7/CRP.1, dated 1 December 2025, which was the basis for discussion at the seventh session of the Working Group from 8 to 12 December 2025. This version incorporated the following adjustments on Section F:[102]

- On the first measure, the text from 1 October 2025 provided that States Parties "***should recognize***" that assistance can be provided under different formats and procedures. The text from 1 December 2025 changed this to a plain statement that States Parties "***recognize***" it.
- Changes on the second measure on National Contact Points were more markedly. Whereas the 1 October 2025 text stated they "***should also serve***"

102 A verbatim record of the eight recommendations in the Draft Final Reports dated 1 October 2025 and 13 February 2026 can be found in the table "Comparison of Section F across the Chair's Non-Paper, Rolling Text and Draft Final Reports" at the end of this Chapter.

as focal points, the 1 December 2025 text reframed this as an encouragement to States Parties to "consider assigning" to their Contact Points the role of serving as focal points for communication on assistance, response and preparedness - adding both a discretionary element and the qualifier "***for communication***."

- On the third measure, capacity-building, the 1 October 2025 text placed primary emphasis on strengthening "***capacity-building***" as a broader framework within which the identification of differences, linkages and synergies between Article VII and Article was highlighted. In contrast to that, the 1 December 2025 text emphasized the strengthening of "***surveillance, detection and response capacities of health systems***" as the central action.
- The fourth measure, on exercises, saw some softening of the language. The 1 October 2025 text provided that exercises should involve government agencies, regional and international organizations and "***civil society***", and that lessons learned "***should be shared widely***." The 1 December 2025 text substituted "***non-governmental organizations***" for "***civil society***" and that States Parties ***were further encouraged to share lessons "on a voluntary basis."***
- The final measure on cooperation and synergies was considerably streamlined. While the 1 October 2025 text made explicit reference to the "possible coordinating role of the United Nations in providing and delivering assistance under the Convention" and named relevant international organizations (WHO, WOAH, FAO, IPPC), the 1 December 2025 text dropped both aspects. At the same time, clarification was also made that States Parties were "encouraged" to continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with [...] organizations with "relevant" expertise.

All the above-recommended measures were agreed on 10 December at the seventh session of the Working Group, ad referendum, without any changes to the text circulated on 1 December 2025. In addition, agreement was found at that session on the recommended measure on voluntary guidelines after some negotiation:

- The voluntary guidelines were broadened and qualified in their scope. The 1 October 2025 text encouraged the "adoption" of guidelines as a template for information to be submitted to the UN Security Council. The 1 December 2025 text encouraged States Parties to "endorse" the guidelines. At the 10 December 2025 meeting, States Parties agreed to include them in an Annex of the Draft Final Report. Furthermore, they extended their use to requests made either to States Parties - in line with the Eighth Review Conference - or

to the Security Council, and added the important safeguard that such information "should not be a prerequisite" for the provision of assistance.

Accordingly, by the conclusion of the seventh session on 12 December 2025, all recommended measures in Section F except one were agreed ad referendum. Thus, the topic of assistance, response, and preparedness under Article VII had achieved the greatest progress in the negotiations on the draft final report by the end of 2025.

Nevertheless, another final push was required regarding the remaining measure on the assistance database. On a positive note, States Parties found agreement on that measure at the eighth session of the Working Group in February 2026. Delegations removed the reference to the funding of the database in this Section and considerably expanded the registry of deployable capabilities for assistance and response under Article VII. It evolved into a detailed, illustrative list, including, inter alia, offers related to mobile biomedical units, various types of equipment, medical countermeasures, emergency medical assistance teams, public health or animal health or medical personnel, transportation capabilities, and various types of assistance and training.



Staff member of the secretariat at the eighth session of the Working Group, 9 -13 February 2026.

Photo credit: BWC ISU.

2.3 Concluding Observations

Many delegations have stressed the importance of an action-oriented outcome from the Working Group and obtaining a common understanding on how to activate and operationalize the provisions of Article VII in case of need.

The preliminary agreement on a set of seven recommended measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII is significant, as it represents an important step towards the Working Group's declared aim. The measures translate longstanding national initiatives into collectively agreed ones, which the Working Group will hopefully agree by consensus at its tenth and final session in December 2026 and then submit for adoption by all BWC States Parties at the Tenth Review Conference in 2027.

The fact that preliminary agreement could already be found on these measures is rooted in a number of reasons:

- Firstly, Article VII is a critical provision under the BWC as it addresses the issue of assistance to States Parties that might have been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention, particularly in the case of alleged use.
- Secondly, some of these proposals have been considered by States Parties for a long time and are ripe for adoption.
- Thirdly, delegations have shown a spirit of compromise in the negotiations, which has helped to reach agreement on these topics.

The eventual adoption of the Working Group recommendations on assistance, protection and response is, of course, linked to progress with the work of the Working Group as a whole. While there has been important progress, considerable efforts will still be necessary to bring the Working Group to a successful conclusion within the timeline set by the Ninth Review Conference.

As this publication goes to print, preparations for the ninth session, from 17 to 21 August 2026, are well underway. Several open-ended informal consultations have been convened since February to narrow down the remaining differences among delegations. The Chairperson has also continued to conduct bilateral consultations to advance discussions on the draft final report and circulate another revised draft for the upcoming session.

As the tenth and final session of the Working Group in December 2026 is approaching, the imperative of finding agreement on the final report of the Working Group is imminent. The Working Group needs to rise to this chal-

lenge, as no other forum holds the mandate to do so in its place. Accordingly, it remains critical that all delegations sustain their engagement and unwavering commitment to strengthen the Convention in all its aspects, whose purpose to "*exclude completely the possibility of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins being used as weapons*", which "*would be repugnant to the conscience of mankind*".[103]

Beyond the diplomatic efforts towards agreeing on a text, the implementation of the Working Groups' recommendations will have also practical implications for States Parties. With regard particularly to Article VII, these may include, inter alia, operational, financial and institutional implications, both at the national level and in the context of the BWC process. Some States Parties, for example, may implement measures at the national level to assign specific Article VII-related tasks to National Contact Points. Moreover, the establishment and maintenance of the Article VII database will require providing the BWC ISU with the necessary financial resources. Absent any actual implementation practice under Article VII, establishing readiness to provide assistance remains critical when a State Party raises a request. The next Chapter will look into some of these practical aspects and highlight a number of critical issues towards the operationalization of Article VII.

103 BWC preamble, paragraphs 9 and 10.

Comparison of Section F across the Chair's Non-Paper, Rolling Text and Draft Final Reports

Measures on assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII

Non-Paper (6 May 2025)	Rolling Text (28 July 2025)	Draft Final Report (1 October 2025)	Revised Draft Final Report (13 February 2026) – all recommended measures agreed ad referendum
Recognize that assistance, both for response and preparedness, can be provided under different formats and procedures.	The Working Group recommends that the States Parties should recognize that assistance, both for response and preparedness, can be provided under different formats and procedures.	States Parties should recognize that assistance, both for response and preparedness, can be provided under different formats and procedures.	States Parties recognize that assistance, both for response and preparedness, can be provided under different formats and procedures.
Recommend that National Contact Points also serves as focal points for the issue of assistance, response and preparedness.	The Working Group recommends that National Contact Points also serve as focal points for the issue of assistance, response and preparedness.	National Contact Points should also serve as focal points for the issue of assistance, response and preparedness.	States Parties are encouraged to consider assigning to their National Contact Points the role of serving as focal points for communication related to the issue of assistance, response and preparedness.
Strengthen capacity-building, including by identifying the linkages and synergies with Article X, recognizing that strengthening surveillance, detection and response capabilities of national health systems, would help to tackle both infectious disease outbreaks of a natural origin and also enhance preparedness to mitigate the consequences of deliberate bio-events.	The Working Group recommends that States Parties strengthen capacity-building, including by identifying the differences, linkages and synergies with Article X, recognizing that strengthening surveillance, detection and response capabilities of national health systems, would help to tackle both infectious disease outbreaks of a natural or accidental origin and also enhance preparedness to mitigate the consequences of deliberate bio-events.	States Parties should strengthen capacity-building, including by identifying the differences, linkages and synergies between Article VII and Article X, recognizing that strengthening surveillance, detection and response capabilities of national health systems would help to tackle both infectious disease outbreaks of a natural or accidental origin and also enhance preparedness to mitigate the consequences of deliberate biological events.	States Parties are encouraged to strengthen surveillance, detection and response capabilities of health systems taking into account the differences, linkages, and synergies between Article VII and Article X of the Convention, which would help to address both infectious disease outbreaks of a natural or accidental origin and also enhance preparedness to mitigate the consequences of deliberate biological events.
States Parties should consider the feasibility of conducting exercises at the national, regional, and international level to ensure readiness and test the operationalisation of capabilities, such as simulations and tabletop exercises. These exercises can help identify best practices, refine response plans, and ensure that assistance	The Working Group recommends that States Parties should consider the feasibility of conducting simulation and tabletop exercises at the national, regional, and international level to ensure readiness and test the operationalisation of capabilities. These exercises can help identify best practices, refine response	States Parties should be encouraged to continue conducting national, regional or international simulation and tabletop exercises in their national capacities to ensure readiness and test the operationalisation of capabilities. These exercises can help identify best practices, refine response plans, and ensure that assistance	States Parties are encouraged to continue conducting national, regional or international simulation and tabletop exercises in their national capacities to ensure readiness and test the operationalisation of capabilities. These exercises can help identify best practices, refine response plans, and ensure that assistance

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mechanisms are both functional and effective and that all parties are better equipped to respond to potential violations of the Convention. These exercises should involve all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and civil society. The possible lessons learned from these exercises can be shared widely as a confidence-building measure.	plans, and ensure that assistance mechanisms are both functional and effective and that all parties are better equipped to respond to potential violations of the Convention. The Working Group recommends that these exercises should involve all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and civil society. Any lessons learned from these exercises can be shared widely to facilitate preparedness among States Parties.	mechanisms are both functional and effective and that all parties are better equipped to respond to potential violations of the Convention. These exercises should involve government agencies, regional and international organizations, and civil society. Any lessons learned from these exercises should be shared widely to facilitate preparedness among all States Parties.	mechanisms are both functional and effective and that all parties are better equipped to respond to potential violations of the Convention. These exercises could involve government agencies, regional and international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. States Parties are further encouraged to share on a voluntary basis any lessons learned from these exercises to facilitate preparedness among all States Parties.
Acknowledge that establishing voluntary guidelines for requesting assistance could facilitate prompt response and the provision of timely humanitarian and other emergency assistance measures by States Parties, if requested in the event of use of biological weapons, including any request for assistance pursuant to Article VII. To that end, recommend the adoption of the voluntary guidelines, which a State Party could use as a template to submit a request for assistance as part of the process of invoking Article VII. Recognize that a State Party may choose to request the Security Council to consider whether that State Party has been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the Convention and that other States Parties provide it with assistance without using the guidelines. Acknowledge that although the use of the guidelines is voluntary, the template can be valuable to	The Working Group recommends the adoption of the voluntary guidelines, which a State Party could use as a template to submit a request for assistance as part of the process of invoking Article VII. In this regard, the Working Group recommends that States Parties acknowledge that establishing voluntary guidelines for requesting assistance could facilitate prompt response and the provision of timely humanitarian and other emergency assistance measures by States Parties, if requested.	States Parties should be encouraged to adopt the voluntary guidelines, which a State Party could use as a template for the information that should be submitted to the UN Security Council with a request for assistance as part of the process of invoking Article VII. In this regard, States Parties should acknowledge that establishing voluntary guidelines for requesting assistance could facilitate prompt response and the provision of timely humanitarian and other emergency assistance measures by States Parties, if requested.	States Parties are encouraged to endorse voluntary guidelines as included in Annex ___ that a State Party could use as a template for the information to be provided with a request for assistance, either to States Parties in accordance with the final document of the Eighth Review Conference or, as part of the process of invoking Article VII, to the UN Security Council. In this regard, States Parties acknowledge that establishing voluntary guidelines for requesting assistance could facilitate prompt response and the provision of timely humanitarian and other emergency assistance measures by States Parties, in accordance with Article VII, if requested, although such information should not be a prerequisite for the provision of such assistance.

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States Parties in identifying what information might be helpful in determining how best to provide assistance.			
Further explore the role of the Security Council, including by considering the information that should be shared when seeking a determination from the Security Council and considering procedures to inform the Security Council's decision-making under Article VII.	The Working Group recommends that States Parties further explore the role of the Security Council, including consideration of the information that should be submitted to the Council with a request for assistance from a State Party. The Working Group also recommends that States Parties be encouraged to consider procedures that may inform the Security Council's decision-making under Article VII of the Convention.		
Establish a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance, and further explore how to operationalize matchmaking of requests for and offers of assistance tools, clarify the potential database users and its relationship with the Article X database, and study of requirements to ensure a database remains up-to-date and useful.	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, the Working Group recommends that the Implementation Support Unit be tasked and resourced to create a database. The database will include, inter alia, a registry of deployable capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams, mobile laboratories, and individual experts. The database should be compatible with other databases maintained by the Implementation Support Unit and will be accessible to States Parties. Any offers, which may be used for both response and preparedness purposes are voluntary in nature and operated and funded by the States Parties nominating them.	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, the Implementation Support Unit should be tasked and resourced to create and maintain such a database funded by assessed and voluntary contributions received from States Parties. The database will include, inter alia, a registry of deployable capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams, mobile laboratories, equipment, training and individual experts. The Article VII database should be compatible with other databases maintained by the Implementation Support Unit and will be accessible to States Parties. Any offers, which may be used for both response and preparedness purposes are	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, States Parties should task the Implementation Support Unit to create and maintain such a database. The database should include a registry of deployable capabilities for assistance and response under Article VII. This registry could include, inter alia, offers related to mobile biomedical units; field-deployable equipment such as mobile field laboratories, portable laboratory gloveboxes; biosafety protective equipment such as containment kits; laboratory personal protective equipment; sample preparation and diagnostic equipment such as early-detection devices; diagnostic and sequencing, PCR, ELISA and microscopy equipment; biology kits;

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		voluntary in nature and operated and funded by the States Parties nominating them.	consumables and reagents; cooling equipment for reagent and sample conservation; decontamination equipment; biological medical countermeasures; such as vaccines, antibiotics, or therapeutics; emergency medical assistance teams; public or animal health or medical personnel; transportation capabilities; assistance with national law enforcement functions; assistance with emergency and humanitarian needs; and training in clinical examination, microbiological analysis, microbial and traditional forensics, epidemiology, public health, environmental and biomedical sampling, sample management, evidence management, use of personal protective equipment, veterinary medicine, disinfection, decontamination, technical maintenance of equipment, and biological waste management. These examples are illustrative and any offers, made by the States Parties, are voluntary in nature and are maintained, operated and funded by the States Parties making them.
Establish a registry of deployable capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams, and mobile laboratories, among others, that can be used for assistance, both for response and preparedness. Also further consider a mechanism to allow timely	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, the Working Group recommends that the Implementation Support Unit be tasked and resourced to create a database. The database will include, inter alia, a registry of deployable	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, the Implementation Support Unit should be tasked and resourced to create and maintain such a database funded by assessed and voluntary contributions	Recalling the decision of the Eighth Review Conference to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII, States Parties should task the Implementation Support Unit to create and maintain such a database. The database should include a registry of deployable capabilities for assistance and

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responses through relevant deployable capacities.	capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams, mobile laboratories, and individual experts. The database should be compatible with other databases maintained by the Implementation Support Unit and will be accessible to States Parties. Any offers, which may be used for both response and preparedness purposes are voluntary in nature and operated and funded by the States Parties nominating them.	received from States Parties. The database will include, inter alia, a registry of deployable capabilities, including mobile biomedical units, response and support teams, mobile laboratories, equipment, training and individual experts. The Article VII database should be compatible with other databases maintained by the Implementation Support Unit and will be accessible to States Parties. Any offers, which may be used for both response and preparedness purposes are voluntary in nature and operated and funded by the States Parties nominating them.	response under Article VII. This registry could include, inter alia, offers related to mobile biomedical units; field-deployable equipment such as mobile field laboratories, portable laboratory gloveboxes; biosafety protective equipment such as containment kits; laboratory personal protective equipment; sample preparation and diagnostic equipment such as early-detection devices; diagnostic and sequencing, PCR, ELISA and microscopy equipment; biology kits; consumables and reagents; cooling equipment for reagent and sample conservation; decontamination equipment; biological medical countermeasures; such as vaccines, antibiotics, or therapeutics; emergency medical assistance teams; public or animal health or medical personnel; transportation capabilities; assistance with national law enforcement functions; assistance with emergency and humanitarian needs; and training in clinical examination, microbiological analysis, microbial and traditional forensics, epidemiology, public health, environmental and biomedical sampling, sample management, evidence management, use of personal protective equipment, veterinary medicine, disinfection, decontamination, technical maintenance of equipment, and biological waste management. These examples are illustrative and any offers, made by the States Parties, are voluntary in nature

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			and are maintained, operated and funded by the States Parties making them.
Continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations with expertise in the matter, as well as the possible coordinating role of the United Nations in providing and delivering assistance including efforts and capacities of Member States and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).	The Working Group recommends that States Parties continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations with expertise in the matter, as well as the possible coordinating role of the United Nations in providing and delivering assistance including efforts and capacities of Member States and international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).	States Parties should continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations with expertise in the matter taking into account their respective mandates, as well as the possible coordinating role of the United Nations in providing and delivering assistance under the Convention, including efforts and capacities of States Parties and relevant international organizations such as the World I lealth Organization (WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).	States Parties are encouraged to continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations with relevant expertise, taking into account their respective mandates.

3. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF ARTICLE VII: INSIGHTS FROM THE PROJECT

3.1 Key Findings from the Article VII Workshop and the Tabletop Exercise: Introduction

As part of the activities under the Project supported by the United States of America to promote the operationalization of Article VII, the ISU organized a two-day International Workshop from 18 to 19 May 2026, as well as a two-day Tabletop Exercise (TTX) from 21 to 22 July 2026, at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates from Permanent Missions based in Geneva, BWC National Contact Points, experts from capitals as well as from relevant international organizations and academia, participated in both events.

The Workshop aimed to promote expert discussions on Article VII, particularly in the context of the ongoing negotiations on this topic within the Working Group, and to contribute to the operationalization of this key provision of the Convention. In particular, the Workshop aimed to:

i. raise further awareness about the provisions of Article VII, including ongoing efforts in the framework of the Working Group;

ii. identify transferable lessons for the BWC from natural disease outbreak response operations and from the implementation of Article X of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW);

iii. address practical considerations towards the operationalization of Article VII; and

iv. share lessons from simulation and tabletop exercises to facilitate preparedness.



Panel Discussion during the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026, GCSP/Geneva

The TTX aimed at addressing certain aspects of raising and responding to a request for assistance in the context of Article VII. It covered different steps and stages from the initiation of a request for assistance to the delivery and receipt of different types of assistance offers.

The purpose of the TTX was to:

i. raise awareness and identify practical lessons pertaining to raising a request for assistance and the related response operation emanating from a request made under Article VII;

ii. make practical use of the "Voluntary Guidelines for Requesting Assistance under Article VII", as included in Appendix 1 of Annex I of the draft final Working Group report[104];

iii. highlight some crucial considerations with which States Parties could be confronted in the context of a request for assistance under Article VII;

iv. provide an opportunity for informal reflections on practical aspects in relation to the operationalization of Article VII; and

v. provide the ISU with lessons on practical steps and actions to be taken in the event of the activation of Article VII and help to test an internal draft

104 Appendix I of Annex I of document BWC/WG/9/CRP.1, dated 24 April 2026.

guidance document prepared by the ISU.

The TTX exercise did not cover deliberations within the UN Security Council, and possible ensuing action. It comprised the three main phases:

- Phase I (Preceding an assistance request): this phase included unconfirmed reports and early signs of a disease outbreak that deviated from usual patterns and therefore raised suspicion. TTX discussions focused on assessing whether the ongoing biological event would trigger BWC involvement and what initial actions could be warranted.
- Phase II (Requesting Assistance): the affected State Party determined that international assistance was needed and decided to activate Article VII. TTX discussions focused on assistance request modalities, potential options, information requirements and information flow between States Parties, with the ISU and with international organizations.
- Phase III (Providing Assistance): offering States Parties and international organizations mobilized various types of support in line with the needs expressed by the requesting State Party. TTX discussions focused on matching requests with offers, coordination aspects and practical implementation aspects.

Each phase was kicked off by a scenario introduction/update to facilitate coordinated play. Additionally, brief thematic presentations highlighted practical aspects of a topic relevant to the respective phase. Participants were assigned to six smaller teams (the affected/requesting State Party composed of an inter-ministerial task force in the capital and the Geneva-based Permanent Mission; two assistance-offering States Parties, WOAH, and the ISU) to facilitate discussions. Thereafter, injects in various forms were used to prompt structured discussions and to exercise decision-making processes among participants.



Table-top Exercise Proceedings, 21-22 July, GCSP/Geneva

Both the Workshop and the TTX focused on the seven draft recommendations on assistance, preparedness and response agreed ad referendum by the Working Group, with particular regard to the practical implications that may arise from their implementation. At the same time, both events also took a broader approach and considered other practical aspects related to the question of operationalizing Article VII as a whole.

This Chapter aims to reflect the outcome of these two activities from the perspective of contributing reflections and effective practices from the participants, and some practical considerations that may characterize, impact and possibly facilitate the future operationalization of BWC Article VII.

3.2 Strengthening surveillance, detection and response capabilities of health systems taking into account the differences, linkages and synergies between Article VII and Article X of the Convention

As highlighted in the previous chapters, States Parties have repeatedly recognized the importance of national preparedness irrespective of whether a disease outbreak is naturally occurring or deliberately caused, and cover diseases and toxins that could harm humans, animals, plants or the environment. The Working Group draft recommendations relating to Article VII encourage States Parties to "strengthen surveillance, detection and response capabilities of health systems, taking into account the differences, linkages and synergies

between Article VII and Article X of the Convention, which would help to address both infectious disease outbreaks of a natural or accidental origin and also enhance preparedness to mitigate the consequences of deliberate biological events."

In their consideration of Article VII, States Parties have in the past recognized the synergy between Articles VII and X with reference to cooperative activities to develop and improve their capacities to prevent, detect and combat human, animal, zoonotic and plant disease outbreaks. In this regard, one delegation stated at the workshop its national position that assistance under Article VII only begins after the UN Security Council decides that the requesting State Party has been exposed to danger as a consequence of a violation of the Convention. According to this view, assistance that precedes it falls within the domain of Article X.

However, no common understanding has been reached on this matter, as other States Parties have expressed different views in past discussions.

In the additional understandings and agreements reached at previous Review Conferences, States Parties also recognized capacity-building at the national and international levels as the most immediate imperative for enhancing and strengthening the capacity of the States Parties to promptly and effectively detect and respond to the alleged use or threat of use of biological weapons.

Project activities highlighted examples of existing national frameworks, procedures and mechanisms to ensure preparedness and response in relation to biological events, as well as the delineation of responsibilities between different national stakeholders and actual capacities in place to prepare for and respond to bio-events. In this context, speakers at the Workshop emphasized the importance of specialized capabilities of national laboratories, particularly high containment laboratories. This includes building laboratory diagnostic capacity through advanced diagnostics, surveillance, field work and regional training, as well as enhancing high-containment research. This approach proved particularly successful during the Covid 19 pandemic in Slovenia, for example.



Prof. Miroslav Petrovec, M.D., Ph.D., Head of the Institute of Microbiology and Immunology, Ljubljana, Slovenia



Pr Dr. Olga Burduniuc, Deputy Director, National Agency for Public Health, Republic of Moldova

Experts also underscored the critical role of laboratories in national emergency response plans, particularly in bioterrorism preparedness. In Germany, for example, the establishment of rapidly deployable outbreak investigation teams, including mobile laboratories, has proven effective in the context of natural disease outbreaks and as a defence tool. It has been noted that the detection of novel pathogens and the defence against deliberate biological threats are closely related capabilities, and that international cooperation can make an important contribution to protecting against dangerous diseases and biological toxins of any origin. Integrated preparedness, especially between the armed forces and emergency services, enables rapid and effective response to biological threats. At the same time, "science follows the response": every response intervention generates data and provide new insights.

During the Workshop, speakers also repeatedly drew attention to important synergies and linkages between capacity-building and strengthened preparedness for bio-events, which can help strengthen surveillance, detection and response capabilities, in the context of the interplay between Articles VII and X.

During the Workshop, speakers also repeatedly drew attention to important synergies and linkages between capacity-building and strengthened prepar-

edness for bio-events, which can help strengthen surveillance, detection and response capabilities, in the context of the interplay between BWC Articles VII and X.

At the Workshop, two real-world case scenarios of foodborne outbreak investigations in Moldova were presented. It was pointed out that Whole-Genome Sequencing (WGS) has proven an important tool for strengthening surveillance, detecting hidden outbreaks and supporting rapid outbreak response. The presented cases evidenced, inter alia, that:

i. genomic surveillance can improve source attribution;

ii. integration of epidemiological and genomic data supports faster, evidence-based public-health decisions and targeted food safety interventions;

iii. WGS integration reduced investigation uncertainty, improved efficiency and contributed to the prevention of further transmission;

iv. it strengthened sequencing and bioinformatic capacities; and

v. it supported the implementation of BWC Articles VII and X.

Overall, it was noted that a strong bio-surveillance system requires integrating emergency response capacities with sustainable scientific, laboratory, and technical cooperation.

Important lessons were also drawn from national experiences related to the delivery and receipt of assistance operations for natural disease outbreaks. As presented by Uganda through a concrete example at the workshop, having real-time information systems in place, and of ensuring coordination among relevant institutions, including for logistics, community mobilization and dealing with the media have proven critical in containing and resolving the disease spread.

Outbreak response systems have generally been conceived for natural outbreaks. However, they need to and can be adapted for deliberate events. At the same time, outbreak response implies acting under uncertainty. Response begins before confirmation of the pathogen involved: waiting delays action, while early response reduces consequences. This is particularly relevant for a disease scenario. From a related perspective, rapid scale-up can be enabled by pre-existing agreements, standard operating procedures, regional and international platforms, and established coordination channels.

From Uganda's experience in dealing with outbreaks of highly contagious and deadly diseases, for example, some key takeaways could be drawn for the purposes of Article VII, namely the need to:

i. build on existing outbreak surveillance and response systems;

ii. focus on the integration of existing structures rather than on creating new ones;

iii. strengthen national capacities in the first place; and

iv. improve clarity of requests for assistance and coordination among relevant actors, including to reduce duplication.

In the context of the TTX it emerged that emergency plans for bio-scenarios do exist in several countries. However, it was noted that further awareness raising and exercising of an Article VII scenario is required. The TTX highlighted the importance of national preparedness, also from the perspective having legal



Participants at the International Workshop on the Operationalization on Article VII, 18-19 May 2026, GCSP

Article X can represent, from the perspective of preparedness, the "stress test" for Article VII. Article VII addresses a danger resulting from a violation of the Convention and the ability to deliver assistance rapidly and effectively. This relies on procedures that have been implemented beforehand at the national and international levels, within the context of Article X. The Working Group's

recommendation recognizes that aspect.

Linkages also exist between Article VII and other provisions of the Convention, such as Articles IV and V. The ability to swiftly provide assistance depends on multiple factors: Existing capacities, established arrangements, and clear procedures. These Convention provisions, therefore, can reinforce each other.

Regarding the links between Article VII and IV on national implementation, it is critical to identify who, at the national level, is responsible for Article VII-related matters, who oversees communicating with relevant regional and international actors as well as the ISU for such purposes, who coordinates incoming assistance, how samples are handled, and how public health, law enforcement, and defence are coordinated. This all boils down to national implementation within the meaning of Article IV.

Article V and the process towards confidence-building and transparency under the CBMs, are equally important to enforce Article VII and make international cooperation under this provision more realistic. Consultations and clarification may be needed before, during, or after a biological event. Affected States will need assistance quickly, but assistance providers will need sufficient confidence that the process will not be politicized. Voluntary information sharing and transparency about capabilities make cooperation more realistic when time is limited.

Overall, it can be considered that if Articles IV, V and X are effectively implemented, Article VII also becomes operationally plausible. In this regard, it is also important to create synergies between the BWC and other relevant international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (see infra).

3.3 The value of national, regional or international simulation and tabletop exercises

In the Working Group's draft recommendations relating to Article VII, "States Parties are encouraged to continue conducting national, regional or international simulation and tabletop exercises in their national capacities to ensure readiness and test the operationalization of capabilities. These exercises can help identify best practices, refine response plans, and ensure that assistance mechanisms are both functional and effective and that all parties are better equipped to respond to potential violations of the Convention. These exercises could involve government agencies, regional and international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. States Parties are further encouraged to

share on a voluntary basis any lessons learned from these exercises to facilitate preparedness among all States Parties."

National experiences in organizing and carrying out different types of exercises aimed at ensuring readiness and testing the testing aspects related to facilitating preparedness and response to deliberate disease outbreaks offer important lessons that can inform a response operation in the context of an Article VII scenario. Such exercises can include local, regional and/or international dimensions.

As pointed out during the Workshop, simulation and tabletop exercises are considered essential tools for preparedness. They can help identify gaps, refine coordination, and make procedures become more realistic and usable in responding to bio-incidents.



Panel discussions on 'Sharing lessons from relevant exercises to facilitate preparedness' at the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026

They help in building and sustaining an effective national and international capability to contain the consequences of natural or deliberate disease outbreaks, and to restore confidence and make a rapid recovery, with minimal loss of life and disruption to the economic well-being of a country. They further help national authorities in addressing potential shortcomings before a crisis occurs, and in establishing or improving critical channels of communication,

as they provide a platform for relevant national administrations to establish and maintain interaction, thereby facilitating coordination.

Equally, at the TTX participants stressed the importance of testing the operationalization of capabilities through national, regional and international simulation and TTXs. In this regard, they appreciated the TTX as a learning opportunity that brought together experts from different regions, and with diverse backgrounds and expertise and challenged them on aspects of the operationalization of Article VII that present uncertainty, also from an operational perspective in case of an actual request for assistance.

3.4 Aspects in relation to the raising of a request for assistance

Draft recommended measures under consideration by the Working Group also encourage States Parties to "endorse voluntary guidelines that a State Party could use as a template for the information to be provided with a request for assistance, either to States Parties in accordance with the final document of the Eighth Review Conference or, as part of the process of invoking Article VII, to the UN Security Council. [...]" States Parties further acknowledged that "establishing voluntary guidelines for requesting assistance could facilitate prompt response and the provision of timely humanitarian and other emergency assistance measures by States Parties, in accordance with Article VII, if requested, although such information should not be a prerequisite for the provision of such assistance."

As discussed in previous chapters, the development of a set of voluntary guidelines has been a longstanding proposal from South Africa, which was first introduced at the 2014 Meeting of Experts. Since then, this proposal has received broad support and has been the object of discussion among States Parties and addressed at multiple meetings, including most recently at the Ninth Review Conference in 2022 and at the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention in 2024.

In the proposed guidelines, the primary purpose of Article VII is intended as humanitarian in nature, with a focus on ensuring that emergency assistance is prioritized. The proposal identifies three basic options for States Parties to request and obtain assistance: i) obtain assistance on a bilateral basis from other States Parties, States and international organizations (the World Health Organization – WHO, World Organization for Animal Health – WOAH, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO) without invoking Article VII; ii) request assistance from other States Parties (States Parties in a position

to do so may provide assistance without UN Security Council approval, as decided by the Eighth Review Conference) or iii) request assistance from the UN Security Council in accordance with Article VII.

There are several benefits that can be drawn from the use of voluntary guidelines to assist a State Party when submitting a request or application for assistance. To ensure that timely emergency assistance is provided, it is necessary to give guidance to States Parties on how a request can be activated and on what information needs to be provided in such a request. Providing detailed information as part of an assistance request would facilitate decision making, help reduce delays, improve coordination amongst responders, and ensure that the assistance provided is targeted to the needs of the affected State Party. It was recalled at the workshop that the guidelines are voluntary, and that it is the prerogative of the requesting State Party to decide whether to supply additional information. The use of the guidelines should not be treated as a precondition for receiving assistance.



Presentation by Ms. Lebogang Phihlela, South African Council for the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026

The text of the "Voluntary Guidelines for Requesting Assistance under Article VII" currently features as Appendix I of Annex I of the Working Group draft final report. They provide a list of information that could be useful when submitting a request for assistance.

The text of Appendix I builds on the South African proposal, which, as mentioned, has been continuously refined throughout the years to incorporate comments made by States Parties. Appendix I to Annex I therefore reflects this body of work.

As stated in paragraph 35 of Annex I of the draft recommendations, the guidelines are intended to serve as a template for States Parties to draw upon, on a voluntary basis, when submitting a request for assistance. The list of information to be provided is illustrative and non-exhaustive, and, as mentioned, the use of the template remains at all times the prerogative of the requesting State Party. So, the chapeau of the Appendix, which reads "The following information could be useful when submitting a request for assistance" is intended to preserve the voluntary and illustrative character of the guidelines, in line with paragraph 35 of the draft recommendations. Paragraphs (a) and (b) of Appendix I concern the identification of the requesting State Party, namely the name of the State Party and the related National Point of Contact. These two elements are intended as basic identifiers that would, in practice, accompany any request for assistance. Paragraphs (c) to (h), concern information about the nature and severity of the event. This comprises information about: i) the date and place of the first reported case, including a description of the related event where applicable; the severity of the event, including the number of cases and fatalities; ii) symptoms and signs, together with any available diagnosis and information on initial treatment; iii) a description of the area involved; iv) all available epidemiological information; and v) actions taken to manage the outbreak. These paragraphs introduce two qualifiers, namely "to the extent possible" and "if possible." These formulations have been chosen to ensure that the requesting State Party is not placed under any expectation to provide more information than may reasonably be available to it at the time of the request. Paragraphs (i) and (j) concern assistance already being provided. The two elements here, on international organizations and on States already involved in the provision of assistance, are intended to facilitate coordination and avoid duplication of efforts among providers of assistance. Paragraphs (k), (l) and (n), concern indications regarding the possible deliberate nature of the event. This includes information on indications of why the outbreak is considered to be the result of a biological attack, the characteristics of the agent

involved if available, and any indication of investigations conducted or being conducted. Given the particular sensitivity of this type of information, the formulation has been drafted to avoid placing an undue evidentiary burden on the requesting State Party. Information on indications of a biological attack is phrased in terms of "indications" rather than evidence. Information on the characteristics of the agent is qualified by the words "if available". Information relating to investigations is phrased in the alternative form as "conducted or being conducted". Taken together with the chapeau of the Appendix and with paragraph 35, this formulation seeks to make clear that none of such information constitutes a prerequisite for the request. Paragraphs (m), (o), (p) and (q) concern operational and logistical aspects of the requested assistance. These include i) information on the types and scope of assistance required; ii) contact details for coordination of assistance, where these differ from the National Point of Contact; iii) licensing requirements for health care personnel and measures to address such requirements; as well as iv) immigration processes for personnel and equipment for the provision of assistance. The intention of these paragraphs is to address some of the practical obstacles to the operationalization of Article VII assistance.

Indeed, the TTX confirmed that the availability of the voluntary guidelines represents a useful guidance concerning the formulation of a request for assistance. The importance for the requesting State Party to reach a certain degree of confidence regarding the possibly deliberate nature of the outbreak before considering raising an Article VII request was also pointed out.

Participants also stressed the importance of providing detailed information in the assistance request for States Parties and other relevant stakeholders to understand and meet needs. In this regard, it was noted that bilateral communication with the requesting State Party would be undertaken by other assistance offering States Parties to understand needs and agree on practical modalities regarding assistance delivery.

3.5 The potential role of National Contact Points in relation to the issue of assistance, response and preparedness

The Working Group's draft recommendations on assistance, response and preparedness also encourage BWC States Parties "*to consider assigning to their National Contact Points the role of serving as focal points for communication related to the issue of assistance, response and preparedness*".[105]

105 BWC/WG/9/CRP.1, dated 24 April 2026. Annex I, F.32.

The BWC does not provide for the establishment of NCPs. The Sixth Review Conference (2006) encouraged "*States Parties to designate a national focal point*" (currently referred to as NCP). The Sixth and successive Review Conferences introduced some specific roles and functions for NCPs, which included:

i. coordinating national implementation of the BWC;

ii. communicating with other States Parties and relevant international organizations;

iii. coordinating and preparing the submission of CBMs;

iv. information exchange on universalization efforts; and

v. the encouragement to provide at least biannually information on implementation of Article X to the ISU.

At this stage, no specific function relates to Article VII. The question remains therefore of whether and how the above-referred Working Group recommendation would affect the work of NCPs.

Workshop discussions pointed out that practice regarding the establishment of NCPs varies greatly among States Parties. NCPs have been placed in different ministries (Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Health, Economy, etc.) or institutions. Related structures and specific functions assigned to NCPs differ considerably from one State Party to another.

However, the Working Group recommendation that NCPs may be assigned a role related to the issue of assistance, response and preparedness does not fall into a vacuum. Aspects related to Article VII can be considered as being embedded in the NCP's broader mandate to coordinate and promote the BWC at the national level. In the context of the process for the preparation and submission of CBMs, moreover, many NCPs have established regular consultation processes with various relevant ministries and other national institutions that can be used to promote exchange of information and coordination also for the purposes of Article VII. Some States Parties already have structured technical committees involving stakeholders specifically relevant to Article VII in place. Other countries are in the process of establishing or structuring their NCP and of identifying relevant focal points in different ministries and institutions at the national level, including those relevant for Article VII. A number of participants found the discussion in the Workshop and the TTX useful for iden-

tifying relevant Article VII stakeholders at the national level and for structuring a coordination process among them.

However, Article VII processes at the national level need to be addressed specifically and further clarified and clearly assigned to NCPs. Some States Parties will need to implement measures at the national level to assign specific Article VII-related tasks to NCPs. In turn, NCPs will need to liaise with additional relevant departments at the national level, such as veterinary services. On the other hand, response to disease outbreaks is already within the competence of specific national agencies, including crisis response mechanisms. Those agencies, however, need to be made aware of the mechanism for requesting and providing assistance under Article VII and its practical implications. The potential financial implications of this additional or adjusted NCP role in relation to Article VII need to be considered too.

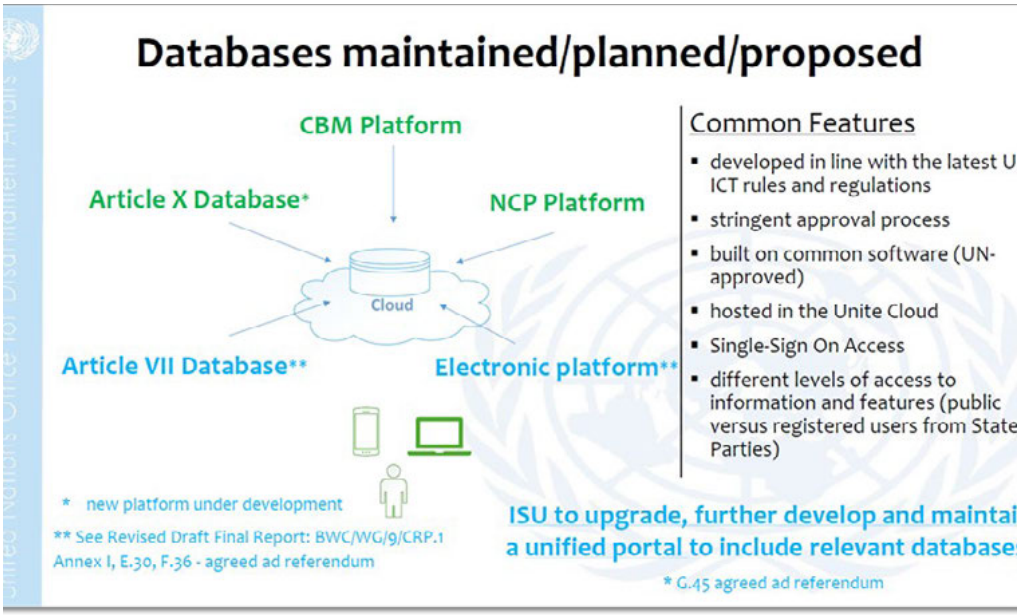
During the TTX, participants noted the critical importance of a fully functional and active NCP playing a role in information exchanges with the ISU and with other States Parties, as well as taking part in the national coordination mechanism established in an assistance scenario, and with regard to assistance mobilization.

The importance of training NCPs and the relevant national institutions and organizing exercises at the national and regional levels on the operationalization of Article VII, with the support of the ISU, was also repeatedly emphasized.

3.6 Practical considerations for the establishment of the Article VII Database

The Eighth BWC Review Conference in 2016 decided to support the establishment of a database containing States Parties' offers and needs for assistance under Article VII. However, the Review Conference did not adopt a corresponding decision to establish the database or to provide the resources for its maintenance. Ten years later, the relevant draft recommendation of the Working Group indicates that: i) States Parties should task the Implementation Support Unit to create and maintain such a database and that ii) the database should include a registry of deployable capabilities for assistance and response under Article VII. [...]" The draft recommendation lists multiple assistance offers as examples, which are illustrative in nature. In addition, the draft recommendation also notes that any offers, made by the States Parties, are voluntary in nature and are maintained, operated and funded by the States Parties making them.

Discussions at the Workshop noted that a number of databases and electronic platforms have already been set up and are currently managed by the ISU. These are the Article X database, as well as the electronic NCP and CBM platforms, which could serve as reference for the establishment and functioning of the Article VII database. While the NCP and CBM platforms are built on the same software and were only recently established, the Article X database is currently being upgraded. In order to ensure compatibility, facilitate maintenance and be fully compliant with UN ICT-related standards, the new Article X database, if approved, will be built on the same common, UN-approved software and ICT architecture.

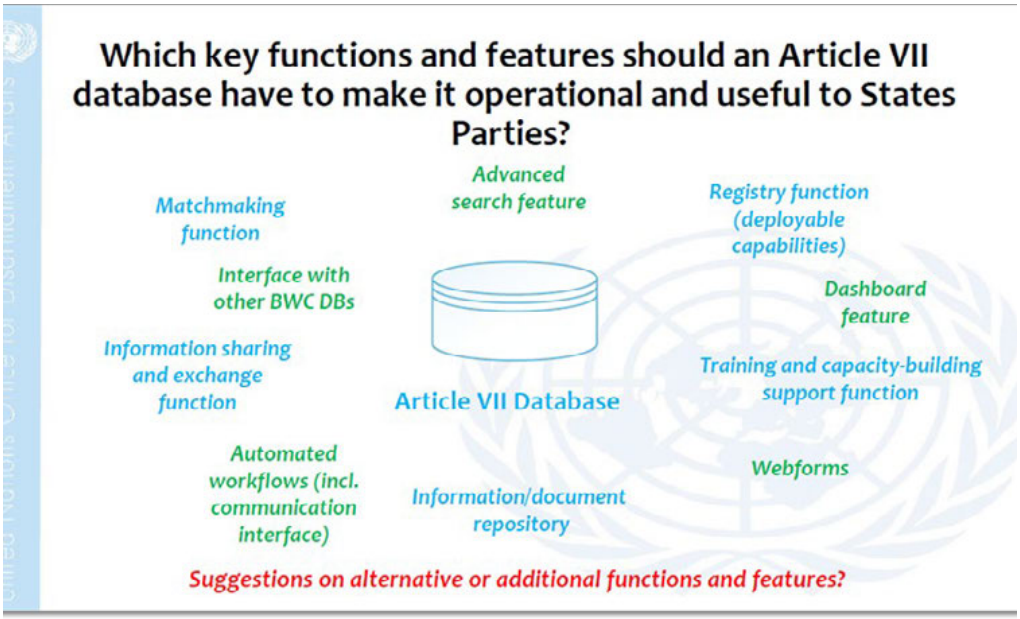


ISU Presentation to facilitate discussions on the Article VII Database at the Workshop, 18-19 May2026

In line with existing practice, at the workshop the ISU explained that the establishment of an Article VII database would follow three main process stages, namely: 1) the design, 2) the development and testing, and 3) the production and use. Overall, the entire development process may take around nine months with timelines depending on a number of approval processes by the UN Office of Information and Communication Technology (OICT).

Of importance, the draft final report of the Working Group provides that the ISU, with the approval of the States Parties, should upgrade, further develop and maintain a unified portal to include relevant databases (i.e. the Article X database, the Article VII database, the electronic CBM platform, the NCP plat-

form and another electronic platform on national implementation measures). In their draft recommendations, States Parties also clarified that the development of the databases and the unified portal should be funded by voluntary contributions, while their maintenance should be funded by assessed contributions.



ISU Presentation to facilitate discussions on the Article VII Database at the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026

During the Workshop, discussions highlighted a number of aspects that could facilitate the design of a future Article VII database:

i. overarching guidance provided by the States Parties that a unified portal should be developed to include all BWC databases;

ii. available guidance from the draft final report of the Working Group concerning the categorization of offers;

iii. taking into account the almost identical registries of deployable capabilities in both the Article VII and Article X databases;

iv. the benefit of using a mind mapping exercise to identify the different flows of activities;

v. designing a user-friendly interface that provides clear guidance about the purpose of the database and that gives contextual prompts to help States Parties to search for, upload and retrieve information;

vi. information on the offers should not be overly prescriptive or too detailed in order to address confidentiality concerns and allow for some level of flexibility;

vii. incorporating a feature to organize offers in the database based on a time lapse addressing the different stages of an assistance operation;

viii. the inclusion of a dashboard to easily visualize offers and their status;

ix. providing a communication interface between assistance-requesting and assistance-offering States Parties in the database;

x. the integration of a search engine that can quickly match requests with existing offers; and

xi. incorporating a public and a restricted part, the latter accessible only to States Parties.

It should also be pointed out that the ISU will maintain separate Article VII and Article X databases while bringing them under one unified platform. In this regard, notwithstanding the differences in purpose and scope between the two databases, some States Parties might be entering the same information and offers on both. Political considerations may play an important role in whether a State Party chooses to deliver the nominated assistance in a given scenario. In this sense, some participants noted that it could be useful to discuss the ISU's potential coordination and support role and related mandate in an Article VII operation.

The Working Group's recommendation relating to the establishment of an Article VII database, which had already been approved by the Eighth Review Conference, represents a stepping stone towards putting this database into place to include a registry of deployable capabilities. Maintaining the database, however, would also imply institutional and financial aspects that need to be addressed. In this sense, it was emphasized that the effective establishment and functioning of the database, and of Article VII in general, will also depend on the capacities of the ISU, which must be endowed with the necessary institutional and financial resources to create and manage the database. .

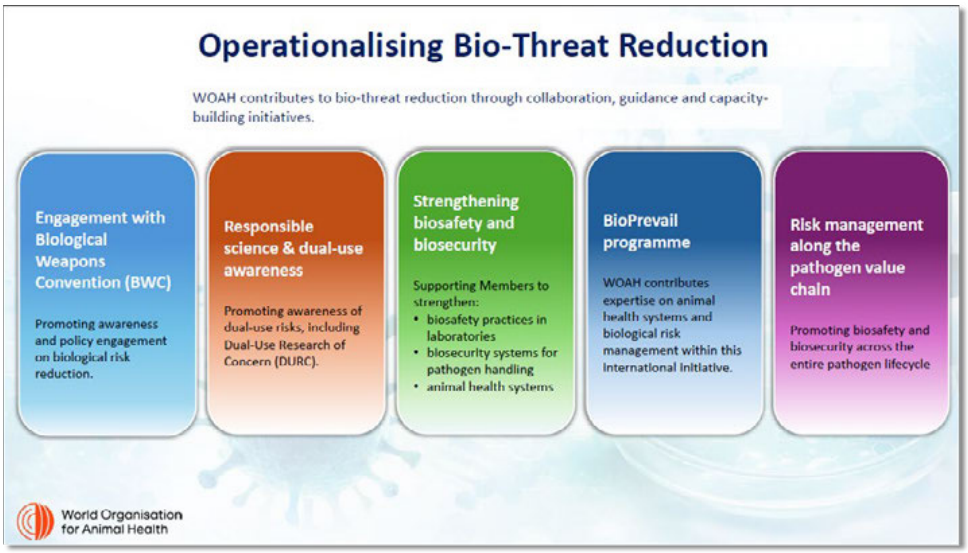
3.7 Cooperation and synergies with relevant national, regional and international organizations

One of the draft recommendations in the draft final report of the Working

Group notes that "States Parties are encouraged to continue to explore means of cooperation and synergies with national, regional and international organizations with relevant expertise, taking into account their respective mandates." In this regard, participants reiterated in the discussions during the Workshop and the TTX that relevant international organisations can play an important role in enhancing preparedness and providing assistance to States Parties in case of the use of biological weapons.

Representatives from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) briefed at the Workshop about their organizations, including respective mandates. In this regard, they underlined that both provide support to their members in preventing and responding to animal and zoonotic diseases.

WOAH addresses biological threats associated with the accidental or deliberate release of animal pathogens through promoting awareness and policy engagement on biological risk reduction, developing standards and guidelines, strengthening collaboration with global and regional partners and existing animal health systems, as well as global disease intelligence through enhancing surveillance, transparency and information sharing. WOAH, through its Biothreat Reduction Programme, provides support to strengthen operational capacities of its Member States in terms of detecting suspicious events (through the issuance of "Guidelines for investigation of suspicious events"), ensuring responsible science (with the issuance of "Guidelines for responsible conduct in veterinary research") and to enhancing preparedness through simulation exercises (and the issuance of "Guidelines for simulation exercises").



Extract from WOAH Presentation delivered at the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026

WOAH is also engaged in supporting its Member States to strengthen veterinary services and laboratory systems, in view of their important role in, inter alia, safeguarding dual-use materials and knowledge. With regard to Article VII in particular, veterinary services may be the first responders in animal disease outbreaks, including suspected deliberate events. Their role in early detection, reporting and coordination is therefore essential for mobilizing assistance and containment. In addition, veterinary services also have a critical role in supporting international cooperation in veterinary science, surveillance, and diagnostics, while reinforcing the need for safeguards to prevent misuses.

FAO has been engaged in strengthening global animal health emergency management for natural disease outbreaks since 2006, particularly through the establishment of the Emergency Management Centre for Animal Health (EMC-AH). The Centre plays a pivotal role in providing support to countries and regions facing animal health emergencies. Since 2022, the platform has embraced a wide range of challenges, including natural disasters, pandemics and other crises impacting food security and livelihoods. The EMC-AH focuses on preparedness, rapid response and coordination to protect food security and livelihoods, particularly in vulnerable areas, and serves as a bridge between FAO technical and emergency operations divisions to strengthen global emergency management capacities and resilience to crises.

The EMC-AH's work is based on three pillars:

i. coordination through developing leadership and expertise and supporting

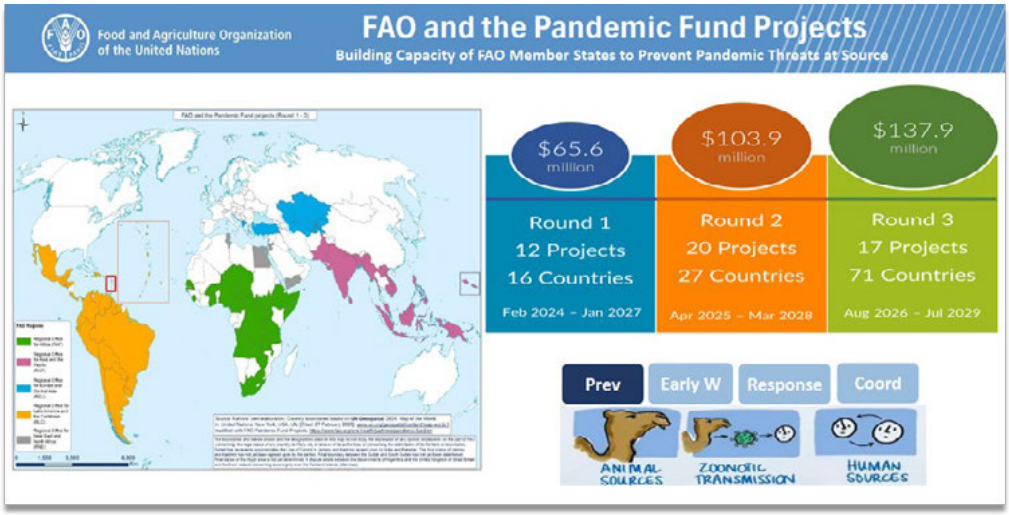
national, regional and international coordination of animal health events;

ii. preparedness through supporting countries in enhancing their readiness for the management of animal health emergencies; and

iii. response through supporting countries at risk or affected to respond to animal health emergencies.

A request for support by Member States can be raised through the competent authority representative (e.g. Minister or Chief Veterinary Officer) of a Member State, which could request relevant support or assistance through the relevant FAO Country Office.

FAO also informed that the Pandemic Fund supports capacity-building projects in FAO Member States aiming to prevent pandemic threats at source. In terms of relevant lessons for the purposes of Article VII, it emerged that a well-functioning emergency management system plays a critical role in safeguarding communities, livelihoods and ensuring resilience in the face of multiple and complex threats.



Extract from the FAO Presentation delivered at the Workshop, 18-19 May 2026

The OPCW's experience under Article X of the CWC also represents a comparative model for the operationalization of Article VII, while acknowledging differences in mandates, scope and institutional infrastructure between the CWC and the BWC.

Similarly to Article VII of the BWC, Article X of the CWC establishes a right for CWC States Parties that have been affected by the use or threat of use of

chemical weapons to request assistance, and a corresponding obligation on the remaining CWC States Parties to provide such assistance. Accordingly, the CWC represents an interesting example from which lessons may be transferred to the BWC. At the same time, there are major differences to consider. As such, the provisions and mechanisms of CWC Article X are comparably much more detailed than BWC Article VII, and its implementation is supported by the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The options for States Parties to provide assistance under the CWC include the establishment of a voluntary fund for assistance (with 48 CWC States Parties currently contributing to it), bilateral agreements on assistance (currently only two in force), and unilateral offers of assistance (experts, equipment, mobile laboratories etc., which currently have been received from 45 CWC States Parties). The OPCW Technical Secretariat also undertakes a series of programmatic activities to operationalize the provisions of Article X. For example, the Protection and Assistance Databank (PAD) is a customized "dashboard" for all Article X declarations and offers of assistance submitted by States Parties. CWC States Parties, moreover, are obliged to annually submit information about their national protective plans (with 69 declarations submitted in 2025), while the OPCW Technical Secretariat supports them in the implementation of such plans, helping in strengthening response capacities, establishing regional cooperation and maintains a database of experts, as well as various capacity-building activities.



Presentation about Article X of the CWC delivered at the Workshop by Mr. Miguel Albaladejo Pomares, Technical Secretariat/OPCW

All these activities, however, rest on a well-structured and well-resourced division of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the International Assistance and Cooperation Division, and its International Assistance and Protection Branch, which works to support the implementation of Article X, including through assistance to CWC States Parties.

The TTX showed that relevant international organizations such as the WHO, WOAH and FAO would be engaged in an Article VII scenario at a very early stage. They would serve as a first contact for reporting obligations as well as for assistance purposes.

Depending on the specifics of the situation, relevant international organizations would support the affected/assistance requesting State Party throughout the entire process from the headquarters and in the field. Upon request, they can provide support with agent characterization and epidemiological investigation, and with liaising with national health and other relevant national agencies. They can deploy teams of experts, also in joint/one-health missions, to support States in assessing the situation and identifying medical countermeasures and other containment measures. International organizations can also support

States in preventing and addressing misinformation, as well with risk communication to reach out to the affected communities. International organizations would collaborate among themselves based on their respective mandates, as well as bilateral and multilateral legal arrangements.

It was also noted that global surveillance and reporting from States to relevant international organizations would be continuous as the outbreak unfolds, and that such reporting promotes transparency and situational awareness.



Tabletop Exercise Proceedings, 21-22 July, GCSP/Geneva

Initial operations by relevant international organization in an Article VII scenario would be essentially a health response. The activation of Article VII, however, might affect the health response operation to an extent. For example, in light of the political context, deployable experts may be chosen depending on nationality, and consideration would be given to protecting the sensitivity and confidentiality of information. Ensuring the security of deployed personnel would also be an important factor in the context of the alleged use of biological weapons.

3.8 The potential role of the ISU in the context of an Article VII and request

Although the ISU has not been formally mandated to receive requests pursuant to Article VII, it forms the core of the Secretariat of meetings of the BWC.

The Sixth Review Conference decided that the ISU, as part of its administrative support to States Parties, should facilitate 'communication among States Parties and, upon request, with international organizations' as well as serve 'as a focal point for submission of information by and to States Parties related to the Convention'.

The TTX provided a useful opportunity to simulate and reflect on potential actions that States Parties might expect of the ISU in case of the invocation of Article VII.

Because Article VII has never been invoked, there was some uncertainty among TTX participants about processes and procedures to be followed. Accordingly, it emerged that both the requesting and other States Parties would potentially look to the ISU for advice from the very early stages of an Article VII process. They may also engage in preparatory informal exchanges with the ISU to understand the practical steps and implications stemming from an Article VII request.



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In the early stages of a possible Article VII scenario, when indications emerge that a suspected deliberate disease outbreak is occurring but no formal action to request assistance has been undertaken by the concerned State(s), the ISU would confine itself to monitoring the situation and beginning initial internal preparations.

The ISU would only take formal action upon request by State(s) and would be

careful to avoid implying or suggesting that the situation falls under or warrants the invocation of Article VII. The ISU would also stand ready to meet with delegations of States Parties upon their request to provide clarification on Article VII and relevant processes.

Following the submission of an Article VII request to the Security Council, several TTX participants noted that the requesting State Party may ask the ISU to circulate its request to all States Parties. They also noted that the requesting State party may ask the Chairperson of the annual Meeting of States Parties to convene a meeting. Based on the submitted request and pending or following a decision by the Security Council, the ISU may be requested to: i) liaise with the requesting State Party to fully understand its assistance needs: ii) analyze assistance assets offered by States Parties; iii) reach out to offering States Parties to ensure that those assets are still available; iv) inform the requesting State Party accordingly; and v) liaise with relevant international organizations to keep abreast of assistance provided by them.

In line with its mandate, the ISU would play a reactive and supporting role, only acting upon request by States Parties. It would not interfere with ongoing processes, which remain in the hands of States Parties. The ISU would confine itself to raising awareness and informing of available assistance offers. The selection of offers would remain the prerogative of the requesting State Party.



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3.9 The possible contribution of civil society towards the operationalization of Article VII

It was noted that civil society can make important contributions towards the operationalization of Article VII. For example, Workshop and TTX participants noted that civil society and academia can:

i. contribute to clarifying what operationalization requires in practice (who raises a request, which channels, what kind of information and evidence are needed, what constitutes adequate assistance, how coordination with relevant international organizations needs to be assured, who is accountable etc.);

ii. support exercises through more realistic scenarios, peer review exercises, and capstone exercises;

iii. provide technical and scientific expertise to national authorities, given that no single ministry or institution holds all relevant knowledge;

iv. help build trust and transparency in a highly politicized context. This includes tracking implementation, sharing good practice, and convening relevant communities; and

v. connect Article VII with broader preparedness and response capabilities, noting that many capabilities overlap with those used for natural outbreaks, while ensuring that Article VII retains its specific function, as assistance in the context of a possible violation of the BWC is distinct from other forms of humanitarian response.

3.10 Concluding observations

The Workshop and TTX demonstrated broad support for strengthening the operationalization of Article VII, while confirming that a number of legal, political, institutional and practical questions remain. Notwithstanding important progress on the topic of assistance, response and preparedness within the Working Group, Article VII remains politically sensitive and procedurally underdeveloped. Its operationalization therefore requires further clarity, guidance and coordination.

Previous Review Conferences have agreed that States Parties may provide assistance pending a UN Security Council decision, that assistance is humanitarian in nature. Participants also recalled States Parties' willingness to provide assistance in the event of use of biological weapons by anyone other than a State Party.

The deliberations at the Workshop and TTX highlighted that the effective implementation of Article VII requires a combination of:

- Stronger and more integrated national preparedness frameworks and mechanisms with clearly assigned roles and responsibilities;
- Improved international coordination and institutional support for the ISU;
- Clearer procedures and practical guidance tools, including voluntary guidelines and a functional Article VII database;
- Sustainable financial and technical resources for States Parties and the ISU; and
- Regular testing of response mechanisms through simulations and exercises.

Absent any history of invocation of Article VII, readiness remains critical for the provision of assistance if a request is raised by a State Party. Existing systems for natural outbreak preparedness and response provide useful models for Article VII operationalization, as many capabilities needed for addressing deliberate biological events are closely related to those used for natural outbreaks. Examples from the OPCW, WOAH, FAO and various States Parties highlighted the importance of:

i. strong disease surveillance, detection and identification systems;

ii. investment in laboratory and diagnostic capacities;

iii. rapid deployment mechanisms;

iv. pre-existing coordination arrangements;

v. integrated national and regional preparedness frameworks;

vi. close collaboration between different services and sectors, such as public health, veterinary, emergency, and security; and

vii. international cooperation which can make an important contribution to protect against dangerous diseases and biological toxins of any origin.

Finally, Article VII cannot function in isolation. Its operationalization depends fundamentally on the strength of national implementation under Article IV, transparency under Article V and capacity-building under Article X — as well as on broader health security systems at the national, regional, and international levels. These Convention provisions are distinct and separate in nature from Article VII. However, they can reinforce each other.



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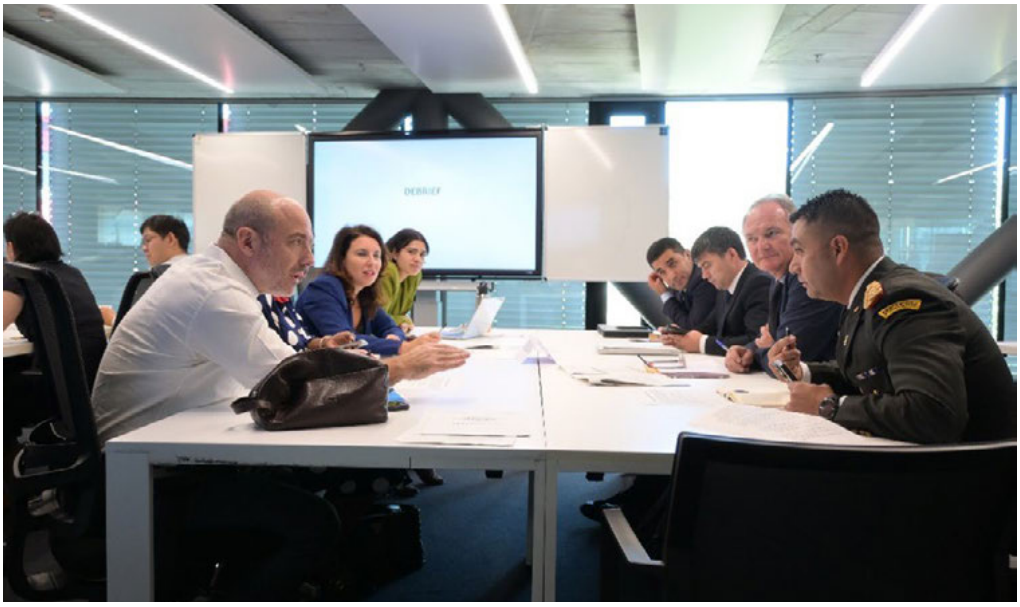

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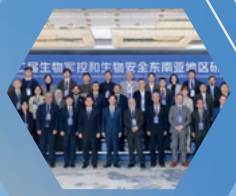









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