

Biological Weapons Convention and Its Implementation

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Reality

“The next epidemic could originate using genetic engineering to create a synthetic version of the smallpox virus...or a super contagious and deadly strain of the flu. We ignore the link between health security and international security at our peril. Whether it occurs by a quirk of nature or at the hand of a terrorist, epidemiologists say a fast-moving airborne pathogen could kill more than 30 million people in less than a year. They say there is a reasonable probability the world will experience such an outbreak in the next 10-15 years.”

-Bill Gates February, 2017



Portfolio of a National Contact Point

- Coordinating the national implementation of the Convention and communicating with other States Parties and relevant international organizations (BWC's Implementation Support Unit);
- Preparing the submission of confidence-building measures;
- Facilitating information exchange of universalization efforts;
- National contact points are a voluntary, non-judicial grievance mechanism based on dialogue facilitation or mediation.



Importance of BWC to Trinidad and Tobago

- Biological weapons can be used not only to attack humans, but also livestock and crops. They can be both deadly and highly contagious.
- Diseases caused by such weapons would not confine themselves to national borders and could spread rapidly around the world.



BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

- Biological weapons are complex systems that disseminate disease-causing organisms or toxins to harm or kill humans, animals or plants. They generally consist of two parts – a weaponized agent and a delivery mechanism.
- They exist primarily as weapons of mass destruction and national mayhem.



Implementation of BWC

Effective implementation of the BWC laws will enable a coordinated, “whole of government” multi-sectoral approach, underpinned by three(3) practical pillars:

1. Comprehensive Legislature.
2. Effective Implementation.
3. Complementary voluntary activities involving cooperation between government, facility operators and scientists.

For effective implementation of the BWC, Trinidad and Tobago is obliged to translate the commitments found in the Convention into effective national action.



Four Key Provisions of the BWC

1. To never under any circumstances acquire or retain biological weapons (**Article I**).
2. To destroy or divert to peaceful purposes biological weapons and associated resources (**Article II**).
3. To take any national measure necessary to implement the provisions of the BWC domestically (**Article IV**).
4. To consult bilaterally and multilaterally to solve any problems with the implementations of the BWC (**Article V**).



Dual Use Concept of Bio-Technology

- The concept is a way of acknowledging that all science and technology, knowledge, equipment and materials are inherently able to be used for both good or bad purposes.
- While science itself may be value-neutral, how it is used is not.



Addressing the Threat

- Early detection, enhanced response, medical counter measures, policy planning.
- Expanded range of engaged stakeholders.
- International frameworks IHR, GHSA, BWC and UNSCR 1540.
- Disease Surveillance.
- Strengthening health systems.
- Disease control capacity.
- Understand, Prevent, Detect and Respond



The Analytical Approach

Step
1

Understand
the Issue

- Identify and Define the issue
- What is Causing the issue
- Who is Contributing to the issue

Step
2

Set
Objectives

- Understand Stakeholder needs
- Revisit the issue statements and set objectives

Step
3

Move
Towards
Solutions

- Policy Instruments
- Assess Policy Instruments
- Enhance Policy Instruments
- Identify and Recommend a Program Option

Step
4

Build The
Program

- Project Management
- Performance Management
- Performance Evaluation

Regionally

- Past outbreaks have shown us that a biosecurity threat to one country is a threat to all countries in our region.
- Caribbean citizens look to their Government for protection against health risks.
- The biggest driver of the economics of pandemics or biological attack is not mortality or morbidity but risk aversion, as people change their behaviour to reduce their chance of exposure.



Parliamentarian Role

In contrast to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the BWC has no formal verification mechanism. The PGA promotes that parliamentarians exercise their distribution powers of oversight, accountability and control to actively promote universality and domestic implementation of the BWC.



Lessons Learnt

- A common vocabulary is important.
- Authorities responsible for biosafety and biosecurity may be disconnected.
- Every University student needs to be a Biosecurity agent.
- The need for a National Laboratory Policy.
- There is no allocation for health security in budgets.



Recommendations

- Engagement of multi-sectoral actions (Legislators and Ministries)
- Capacity building
- Universalisation of the BWC
- Codes of Conduct
- Identification of gaps that may compromise response to biothreats.



The Future

- BWC Implementation and Universality is about a long term sustainability.
- Done wrong : Biosecurity is always a risk.
- Done right : Biosecurity can support development and sustainable economic return.
- Biosecurity is a way of life and it's everyone's business.
- The Proclamation of “**Act No.4 of 2012**” is imperative to the implementation of BWC in Trinidad and Tobago.



A tropical beach scene with a palm tree, lounge chairs, and a wooden pier extending into the turquoise ocean under a blue sky. The text "THANK YOU!" is overlaid in the center.

THANK YOU!