

Introduction

On 5th December 2011 States Parties to the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)¹ will reconvene in the Palais des Nations in Geneva for the treaty's Seventh Review Conference. This comprehensive BWC Briefing Book has been compiled to facilitate and stimulate active participation in the Conference by government delegations. It contains official documents and other texts relating to the biological weapons regime, including: official BWC documents (including the Final Documents from the previous five Review Conferences); documents from the United Nations, other international and regional organisations; documents from other arrangements; and a section on non-governmental involvement. Although designed primarily for Review Conference delegates, we hope this Briefing Book will also be a useful resource for researchers, NGOs, journalists and others in civil society with an interest in the biological weapons regime embodied in the BWC.

The BWC is a landmark treaty in international efforts to tackle threats to international peace and security as it was the first treaty to comprehensively ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. While the BWC itself may have been through trials and tribulations over its almost 40-year lifespan, it reflects a fundamental norm of the international community – that the hostile use of disease is indeed “repugnant to the conscience of mankind.” We view the Seventh Review Conference as an opportunity to consolidate the past achievements of the BWC and to plan for its future. We believe that the norm embodied in the BWC is strong and that the Review Conference can take practical steps to improve the universality and implementation of the Convention.

Background to the Briefing Book

The primary idea behind the Briefing Book is to assist delegates at the forthcoming Review Conference in their work and thus to contribute to a successful and constructive outcome to the Conference. By collecting together as many of the key relevant documents as possible, we hope to provide a convenient reference source for use during this Seventh BWC Review Conference, and beyond.

Experience, from having attended many previous BWC meetings as well as other international diplomatic gatherings, shows how advantageous it can be to have as many of the relevant documents as possible collected into one publication. We also hope that the Briefing Book will raise awareness of the BWC both with states that have not yet joined the Convention, and with researchers, academics, journalists and the general public who have an interest in issues relating to it. In producing this Briefing Book, we also hope to demonstrate the constructive input which civil society can make to international meetings such as the Seventh Review Conference. We are both longstanding supporters of the BWC and we see this Briefing Book as one of our contributions to nurturing and strengthening the Convention.

This volume is also intended to complement other activities by civil society at the Review Conference, such as the production of the daily reports under the auspices of BWPP (see <http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>).

¹ *Note on terminology:* The *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction* is known by two common names: the *Biological Weapons Convention* and the *Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention* with the consequent abbreviations BWC and BTWC. Therefore, the Seventh BWC Review Conference is also known as the Seventh BTWC Review Conference.

This Briefing Book follows on from earlier volumes prepared for the Sixth BWC Review Conference in 2006 and the Second Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2008. This volume has been made possible through the financial support of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Mountbatten Centre for International Studies (MCIS), based within the University of Southampton, has produced an NPT Briefing Book, first published in 1990, which served as a model for this Briefing Book (see <http://www.mcis.soton.ac.uk>). There seemed to be no obvious reason why something which was clearly useful and well-received by delegates to NPT Review Conferences would not also be seen in the same way by delegates to BWC Review Conferences.

The concept of a Briefing Book for Review Conferences was initially discussed at a workshop of the Pugwash Study Group on the Implementation of the CBW Conventions in April 2005 in the Netherlands. The immediate priority then was the Sixth Review Conference and thanks to the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, HSP together with two other non-governmental organizations, the British-American Security Information Council (BASIC) and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) produced a Briefing Book for the Sixth Review Conference. Such was its success that HSP decided to produce a similar Resource Guide for the Second CWC Review Conference 2008. Through financial support from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal this idea was realised.

Selection of Documents

Following past precedent, editorial control regarding the content of this Briefing Book lies with the authors. In preparing a compilation of reference documents, we necessarily had to make decisions about which documents, or portions of them, to include or exclude. We realise that questions may be asked about our selection criteria, such as why we included one particular document and not another.

One easy answer to these questions relates to space; this Briefing Book is already quite a bulky volume and including more documents would have meant an even heavier book, and one that our target audience would be less likely to use. This reduces the possibilities of including lengthy documents in their entirety, except where they were essential or where extracting sections would have lessened their usefulness. Where we have included extracts from long documents we provide a reference to the original text.

In order to include those documents of most relevance to the Seventh Review Conference, we have focused on source materials published since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006. The main exception to this has been documents from previous Review Conferences and other BWC meetings. We include the report from the Preparatory Committee in April 2011 but have refrained from including any other documents of the Seventh Review Conference that have been released in advance because they will be distributed at the Review Conference.

We are also aware of the excellent resource that is <http://www.opbw.org> where hundreds, if not thousands, of BWC documents from the First Review Conference in 1980 onwards are available. Similarly, the website <http://www.unog.ch/bwc> also contains many of the official BWC documents from the First Review Conference onwards, including advance copies of papers for the Seventh Review Conference and information for States Parties, NGOs and the media. While aware of these electronic resources and keen to avoid duplication, we were also intent on producing something that was useful to delegates in the conference room and when away from computers.

This Briefing Book will also be hosted on the website <http://www.bwc2011.info>. Whilst the documents in the hard copy version of this Briefing Book are in English the e-version not only replicates the hardcopy Briefing Book but also contains, where readily available, the documents in their official translations into the five other UN languages.

While we have tried to be as comprehensive as possible, it is likely that we have missed some useful documents or that people will take issue with our selection policy. We therefore welcome comments on this Briefing Book, including suggestions of additional documents that may be included in a future edition.

Outcomes

A successful outcome of the Seventh Review Conference is vital to avoid the risk that the BWC may be seriously undermined at a time when biological weapons are recognised as a growing threat to international security. The authors firmly believe that the BWC remains the cornerstone of global efforts to prohibit and prevent biological weapons. However, for it to be truly effective, the Convention requires continued and renewed support. The baseline objective for a successful outcome at the Review Conference, therefore, should be for States Parties to identify, develop and promote initiatives for strengthening the BWC in the framework of a further series of annual meetings between the Seventh and Eighth Review Conferences, as has been suggested by a number of States Parties. However, more is needed than a repeat of the first two intersessional processes where common understandings were developed but little effective action taken. There is no shortage of pragmatic recommendations on how the intersessional process might evolve; what is needed at the Review Conference is innovative thinking and political will.

It is clear that there is no one single solution to a problem as complex as the threat posed by biological weapons. What is required is the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders at all levels from the individual to the international. In this regard, this Briefing Book will help to demonstrate the range of organizations, initiatives and arrangements that are already engaged in this process and contributes positively to promoting interactions and constructive collaborations.

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