

ASEAN Regional Forum
Workshop on Biological Threat Reduction
Manila, Philippines
June 10-11, 2009

Co-Chairs' Summary Report

1. Pursuant to the 15th ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting in Singapore, July 2008, the ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Biological Threat Reduction was held on 10-11 June 2009 in Manila, Philippines. The Workshop was co-chaired by Mr. Leo M. Herrera-Lim of the Philippines and Dr. Jason Rao of the United States.

2. The Workshop was attended by representatives of Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, the United States, and Vietnam. Invited guests represented the following organizations: UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, and INTERPOL. Participants held the view that the presence of relevant inter-governmental organizations greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the discussion.

International Efforts to Mitigate Biological Threats

3. The Philippines and United States chaired the Opening Session of the workshop. In opening remarks, the co-chairs noted the importance of countering threats posed by bioterrorism and the emergence of infectious diseases and the important role that ARF could play in the areas of biosafety and biosecurity.

4. Mr. Robert Michael Stagg from the Australian Department of Defense provided a presentation on international biological threats. The presentation provided an overview of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism, noting historical events in the United States, Japan, and Afghanistan as well as global trends. The presentation concluded that the most likely scenario for a biological terrorism event would be through the weaponization of a suitable biological strain from a legitimate facility, therefore highlighting the need to better secure pathogens. Effective biosecurity requires multiple different security layers at facilities housing pathogens and points to the importance of countries knowing the locations of all domestic pathogens.

5. Mr. Richard Lennane, speaking on behalf of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Implementation Support Unit (ISU) located in the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs in Geneva, offered a report on the BWC and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540, stressing their complementary purposes and noting the importance of national implementation for both in parallel through national legislation. The report also highlighted the work of the BWC ISU in helping coordinate information exchange for biological threat reduction among Member States and relevant intergovernmental organizations, as well as private industry and non-governmental

organizations. The report encouraged all ARF participants to send representatives to the August 2009 BWC Experts Meeting and the December 2009 States Party Meeting in Geneva, which will be covering the topic of promoting capacity building in disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment.

6. Dr. Christopher John Oxenford represented the World Health Organization and provided a report on WHO biorisk reduction management activities. The report outlined the spectrum of worldwide microbial threats and factors in emergence, noting the importance in East Asia of public health measures. The report stressed that the best defense against biological threats is a robust public health system that collaborates with all domestic and international health stake holders. Safe, secure, and sustainable laboratory service is an integral component. The report noted the important contribution of the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Disease, which has assisted countries in meeting their International Health Regulation obligations and improved capacity in laboratory detection measures.

7. Mr. Joris De Baerdemaeker represented INTERPOL, which plays an essential role in biological threat reduction, and reported on the activities of the Bioterrorism Prevention Programme (BPP). The report noted the importance of engaging both health and law enforcement agencies to improve capacity to counter biological threats and training law enforcement personnel on appropriate questions when investigating biological incidents. Through regional Train-the-Trainer programs, INTERPOL BPP is developing a cadre of trained personnel, enhancing communication among countries in regions, and identifying gaps in legal measures needed to address biological threats. The report noted the importance of using a regional approach to training that promotes strong partnerships and information sharing. The report also announced that INTERPOL will hold a Train-the-Trainer program in Asia in February 2010.

National Efforts to Mitigate Biological Threats

8. The plenary session was divided into three sections and focused on participant countries' national experiences in mitigating biological threats. The first section of the plenary session was moderated by the Philippines. The Philippines, Pakistan, Canada, and the European Union (EU) offered briefings on measures they were taking to organize across multiple government agencies, the administrative and legislative measures required, and outreach and support to other nations. These presentations pointed out the benefits of personal networking with interagency counterparts, and examined the important roles played by personnel in health, academia, law enforcement, defense, as well as the need to reach out to multiple stakeholders including industry, medical and professional organizations, and the press. Additionally, presenters noted the domestic security advantages received through building up other countries' capacity to mitigate biological threats.

9. The second section of the plenary session was moderated by the United States, and included presentations by Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia. These presentations examined dual-use issues arising from the ready availability of information and

technology, the necessity of having a national plan and training for responding to biological threats, and the importance of identifying domestic gaps and appropriate solutions. Presentations highlighted the process of communicating across multiple agencies and related challenges by offering actual examples of events involving biological threats. Presentations noted problems of interagency communication, poor understanding of biological threats, and lack of resources for disease detection, surveillance, and response at the local government level, while highlighting successes achieved through training drills as well as field and table-top preparedness exercises.

10. The third section of the plenary session was moderated by the United States and included presentations by China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, and the United States. These presentations addressed export controls, the role of research laboratories, and public outreach to promote biosafety and biosecurity awareness and responsibility. The presentations stressed the necessity of regular training to update laboratory researchers on the latest best practices and the need for tailored management systems. They also noted that effective biological threat mitigation practice will have benefits across the full spectrum of biological threats, including natural, accidental, and intentional infectious disease events.

11. During the presentations, many participants recognized that equipment for biosafety and biosecurity is expensive. Some participants called for more transfers of technology to assist countries in enhancing capability to respond to biological threats. Many participants noted implementation of UNSCR 1540 will assist in improving capacity to respond to biological threats. All participants called for greater international cooperation and recognized the ARF as a valuable venue for continuing the discussion of biological threat mitigation.

12. During the discussion periods, participants raised questions on laboratory accreditation procedures, on how the human health and veterinary sectors could interoperate, on joint public health and law enforcement investigations, on how mitigation of biological threat can be incorporated politically in defense policy without immediate threats, and on the effectiveness of past training programs. Participants also discussed specific issues in transporting reference cultures from other countries and the need to include laboratory ethics, biosafety, and biosecurity training within all stages of academia.

Working Group Discussions

13. On the second day of the Workshop, participants were divided into three working groups, in order to foster exchange and continue to share national experiences in an effort to identify gaps and forward an ARF position on preventing, detecting, and responding to biological threats within the ARF region and beyond. Working group discussed and developed best practices for: 1. Preventing Biological Threats; 2. Detecting and Identifying Biological Threats; and 3. Controlling and Responding to Biological Threats.

14. The Working Group on Preventing Biological Threats was co-moderated by Indonesia, the Philippines, and the United States and covered the topic of Preventing

Biological Threats. The scenario covering a biological incident was used as a spring board for discussion. The Working Group discussed the implications of working with various pathogens, including zoonoses. Drawing from their individual backgrounds and technical expertise, participants shared experiences and insights. Specific issues regarding pathogen inventory, the select agent list, how to determine whether the act was accidental or deliberate, personnel reliability, how to communicate within an agency and between agencies were examined. Participants also discussed how we can prioritize limited funding. Participants cited case studies from real experiences in H1N1, Ebola Reston and Foot and Mouth Disease as a way of drawing lessons-learned useful for enhancing collaboration and communication.

15. Participants tried to determine how communication flows from the public health sector to the law enforcement sector and vice versa. Some examples were given for how the public health sector can inform the law enforcement group but it was more difficult to give an example when law enforcement communicates to the health sector on a potential threat. Participants stressed that there was a need to foster interagency channels of communication. For some countries, existing set-ups may be used, strengthened, enhanced, and built-upon to address biological security. There was general agreement that the public health sectors, law enforcement, and academia were key players in the over-all scheme of promoting biological security.

16. The Working Group on Detecting and Identifying Biological Threats was co-moderated by the Philippines and the United States and covered the topic of Detecting and Identifying Biological Threats. Participants worked through a presented scenario involving a fictional country needing to respond to a biological incident while preparing for a major international sporting event. It underscored the need to emphasize public health and law enforcement responses to an infectious disease outbreak of unknown origin.

17. Discussions noted several key points including that (1) cooperation between law enforcement and public health is critical for sharing information to make necessary links that could indicate a potential bio threat/incident; (2) communication and the language used is important for information sharing; (3) the need for integration and tracking of data and intelligence from multiple sources and (4) the need for forensic capabilities. In summary, participants concluded that law enforcement and public health must not only work together during a potential bioterrorism event, they must cooperate closely. Formal liaison activities and exercises are key in developing the necessary linkages during a potential crisis.

18. The Working Group on Controlling and Responding to Biological Threats was co-moderated by the Philippines and the United States. Participants worked through a presented scenario involving a fictional country needing to respond to a biological incident while preparing for a major international sporting event. The Working Group recommended to strengthen national plan for a comprehensive response, enhance capacity and encourage funding to improve response capability to biological threats. It also viewed the need to strengthen cooperation amongst stakeholders especially from

government and private sectors. It also recommended the promotion of mechanisms for information sharing and coordination among responding institutions and the development of a joint risk communication for all audiences.

19. Participants noted the importance of establishing relationships amongst responding agencies and institutions in order to build trust and promote effective information sharing. Participants stressed the importance of regular interagency training and table-top exercises in establishing these networks and enhancing capacity. Participants also recognized that capabilities and networks built for special events can build capacity for day-to-day occurrences. Participants recommended that concerned agencies begin communicating during the early stages of an incident and work together closely in order to enhance the effectiveness of the response.

Conclusions and Steps Forward

20. The Co-chairs reiterated the need for further cooperation within the ARF on mitigating biological threats. In this context, the United States announced it would put forward a document on Cooperation in Combating Global Biological Threats and Preventing Bioterrorism including the recommended best practices arising from the working group sessions. This statement would be proposed for consideration by Senior Officials' Meeting to recommend to Ministers for endorsement at the 17th ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial Meeting in 2010.