



Online Workshop on the Establishment of a Database to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention

Second Session
Wednesday, 12 May 2021
13:00 – 14:30 (CEST)

GUIDANCE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Background and Objective

The objective of the Online Workshop is to provide an informal opportunity to exchange views on the establishment of a database to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII and its further development. In particular, the workshop will aim to gather technical input on key issues for the operationalization of the database and related topics, based on the analysis of lessons learned from assistance databases utilized in relevant international organizations, which was conducted in November 2020.

Following the first session of the workshop on 4 May 2021, which provided an overview of the database concept and the key issues for its further operationalization, the second session will provide an opportunity to address such issues in more detail at the technical level.

To facilitate technical discussions during the session, a summary of the issues is provided below, as well as related findings and possible options that may require attention for the operationalization of the Article VII database. The summary is prepared for reference purposes only and is not intended to preclude discussions or input on any other related topics that may be of interest for participants. Further information on the study may be found in the Background Document for the Online Workshop and the presentation provided during the first workshop session.

Format of Discussions

Discussions will be grouped into four topics: 1) Database Objectives and Functions; 2) Types and Categories of Assistance Resources; 3) Users and access; and 4) Database Development and Maintenance.

The topic moderator will present the topic using Powerpoint slides for ease of reference and will invite participants to provide their input and comments on each slide. Participants may raise their hand through the icon should they wish to take the floor to comment on the topics reflected on a specific slide. Alternatively, participants may also provide their input or questions through the chat function. Each topic will be allocated a maximum of 20 minutes for discussion.

A summary of the discussions will be presented during the third [and final] session of the Online Workshop on 2 June 2021.

Topic 1: Database Objectives and Functions

Which objectives and functions may be considered for an Article VII database?

An Article VII database could consider the following objectives and functions:

- **Awareness-raising function:** An assistance database may provide general information on preparing and responding to an event to contribute to public awareness on the subject. For this function, States Parties should have an understanding on the information that may be made publicly available (to be discussed on topic 3 below)
- **Resource registry function:** An assistance database may provide a platform for registration of assistance resources or capabilities that could be made available for assisting to preparedness and response to an event. This function would address one of the main challenges in assistance response mechanisms, namely the availability and readiness of assistance resources
- **Information exchange function:** An Article VII assistance database may provide a source of information for BWC States Parties on preparing and responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon ('event'). This function would also support response coordination by consolidating and making readily available relevant information, such as contact points and procedures
- **Preparedness and capacity-building function:** An assistance database may provide information on capacity building opportunities and enable matchmaking of requests and offers to enhance bio-preparedness. For this function, it would be useful to have clarity about the relation of an Article VII database with the existing Article X database. For instance, database functions may need to be considered to avoid duplications or enable cross-reference
- **Matchmaking function:** An assistance database may provide a platform for submitting and eventually matching offers and requests for assistance. For this function, procedures for the submission of requests and offers of assistance in the framework of Article VII should be in place

Topic 2: Types and Categories of Assistance Resources

Which types and categories of assistance resources or capabilities may be registered, requested and/or offered in the context of an Article VII database?

Assistance resources covering aspects that may be relevant for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon (e.g., preparedness and protection, detection and mitigation, prophylaxis and therapeutic treatment, logistics and operations), could include:

- **Information:** manuals, reference material, procedures, reports and publications on preparedness, response and means of protection issued by national governments or regional/international organizations, national databases, list of contact points etc.
- **Expertise:** rosters of experts (e.g. epidemiologists, microbiologists, experts in infection prevention and control, clinical researchers, social scientists etc.) who may be available for assisting in preparedness and/or response
- **Capacity-Building:** offers or programmes for technical assistance or training in developing national response capabilities, including online training resources

- **Field Teams:** rosters of teams ready to mobilize on short notice to provide assistance in responding to an event
- **Services:** laboratory or medical services for the analysis of samples or the treatment of patients abroad
- **In-kind contributions:** vaccines, drugs, medical, laboratory or protective equipment.
- **Financial contributions/Voluntary Fund for Assistance:** States Parties could decide to establish a voluntary fund for assistance in responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon. The fund could also be used to support specific types and categories of assistance resources requiring financial contributions. Specific guidelines from States Parties would be needed for receiving and authorizing the use of contributions.

Illustrative guidance on the broad types and categories of resources that may be registered/requested/offered in the context of an Article VII database would facilitate matchmaking of requests and offers of assistance.

Topic 3: Users and Access

Who may be registered as user of an Article VII database?

For an Article VII database, the following options for registration of users could be considered:

- Users from Government agencies or other entities nominated through official channels (e.g. Permanent Missions, designated National Contact Points in States Parties etc.)
- Users from international organizations through the designated contact points in relevant organizations
- Users from NGOs if registered as users by designated contact points in States Parties

Who should have access to the information reflected in an Article VII database?

Similar to the approach agreed for the existing BWC Article X database, registered resources ranging from information to capacity-building, expertise and equipment could be made publicly available. Exceptions could be indicated on a case-by-case basis by the offering State Party. Access to workflows for requests and specific offers of assistance would be limited to users.

A key factor when considering options for user registration is the importance of allowing relevant assistance providers to register their resources. Information on categories, registration and rights of users should be reflected accordingly in the database guidelines.

Topic 4: Database Development and Maintenance

What features could be prioritized in the initial development phase of an Article VII database?

Examples of features that could progressively be considered for a phased approach in developing an Article VII database are the following:

- 1) Data collection and entry through the registration of users, information and assistance resources and corresponding general database user guidelines

- 2) Workflows for matching requests and offers of assistance related to preparedness and capacity-building as per general database user guidelines
- 3) Needs assessment and guidance tools for submissions based on a mapping of needs for bio-preparedness and response that could be developed by experts from States Parties, which would facilitate matchmaking and contribute to readiness of assistance resources
- 4) Event feature for online coordination of training or simulation events and exercises
- 5) Workflows for matching requests and offers of assistance in the event of use of a biological or toxin weapon, based on relevant procedures to be agreed by States Parties

What are the resource implications for the ISU as database administrator?

In terms of responsibilities linked to managing access, authenticating data, and supporting submissions by users, the ISU could assume the role of administrator of an Article VII database within existing resources. The same goes for standard tasks associated with facilitating database use and maintenance, periodic upgrades and development phases.

The development of the database and user interface tool itself in its various phases, as well as periodic upgrades or new database features, could build on existing IT work and platforms but would still require dedicated IT support and related funding to be made available, as the ISU does not have IT developer expertise.