



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

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

The Article VII Database

France and India submitted a proposal ([BWC/CONF.VIII/PC/WP.38/Rev.1](#)) for the establishment of a database for assistance in the framework of Article VII of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to the Preparatory Committee for the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. While the Review Conference agreed that it “supports the establishment of a database open to all States Parties to facilitate assistance under the framework of Article VII”, it did not provide a specific mandate for its establishment and the database has therefore not yet been created.

At the 2017 Meeting of States Parties, States Parties agreed that the Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX4) would consider the topic of “Procedures, including the establishment and use of the assistance database, to improve the prompt and efficient response without preconditions to a request of assistance by a State Party under Article VII”.¹ France and India subsequently re-submitted their Working Paper ([BWC/MSP/2018/WP.7](#)) to the 2018 Meeting of States Parties and discussions on the concept of a database have taken place on numerous occasions since then.²

Building on the support agreed by the Eighth Review Conference, many States Parties therefore hope that the upcoming Ninth Review Conference will mandate the establishment of an Article VII database. The purpose of the database would be to implement Article VII and allow matching specific offers and requests of assistance. The database would respond to the need of developing effective measures and coordination with relevant international organizations to respond to a biological or toxin weapon, while providing benefits to States Parties in terms of awareness, information exchange, national and international preparedness, and capacity-building.

Objective and structure of the workshop

To contribute to the deliberations in MX4, France and India, with the support of the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), plan to conduct a series of events and briefings during 2021-2022 to support deliberations among States Parties towards the eventual establishment of an Article VII database by the Ninth Review Conference. The “Online Workshop on the Establishment of a Database to Facilitate Assistance under the Framework of the Biological Weapons Convention” is being organized in this context.

The objective of these events is to provide an opportunity for States Parties to exchange views on the database concept and its further development. In particular, the workshop will aim to gather technical inputs 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

¹ “Procedures, including the establishment and use of the assistance database, to improve the prompt and efficient response without preconditions to a request of assistance by a State Party under Article VII”.

² MX4/2018, MX4/2019, Article VII Seminar at GCSP on 19/11/2019, Informal MX4 webinar on 12/11/2020.

conducted in November 2020. The main findings resulting from this analysis are summarized below as general reference for States Parties and participants attending the workshop.

The workshop will consist of three sessions open to all States Parties, international organizations and representatives from civil society, as follows:

- 1) 4 May 2021: Session 1 will provide an overview of the database concept, including its anticipated advantages and benefits for States Parties, and of the key issues for the further operationalization of the database, and provide the opportunity to share general views or questions in this regard.
- 2) 12 May 2021: Session 2 will be oriented at technical experts and provide an opportunity to address specific issues in more detail, based on information sent to registered participants prior to the session.
- 3) 2 June 2021: Session 3 will summarize the preliminary findings and views expressed during the previous sessions and provide an opportunity for a general discussion.

For more information on these events, please contact the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit at bwc@un.org.

Study on lessons learned from assistance databases

In order to contribute to the preparatory work needed for the further development of the database concept, an analysis of lessons learned from assistance databases in other international organizations has been conducted, which identified specific issues that could be addressed by States Parties for the operationalization of the database.

Lessons learned from assistance databases operated in relevant international organizations show that outstanding issues for the operationalization of the Article VII database may relate to the following: (i) Database objectives and content; (ii) Database development; and (iii) Database promotion.

Database objectives and content

Lessons learned from assistance databases operated in relevant international organizations show that reaching a common understanding on the following among States Parties would be necessary for the operationalization of the Article VII database:

- **Overall database objectives and functions.** An Article VII database may include objectives and functions related to information exchange, the registry of assistance resources and the matchmaking of requests and offers of assistance for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon and that also contribute to national and international preparedness in coordination with relevant international organizations, while promoting public awareness on related issues.
- **Types of assistance that may be registered, requested and/or offered by States Parties.** An Article VII database may be flexible in identifying the types of assistance that may be registered, offered and/or requested for preparing and responding to the use of biological or toxin weapons, which could for instance include technical information, rosters of experts, capacity-building opportunities, field teams, off-field services, equipment and funding. In this context, the possibility of establishing a voluntary fund for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon may require particular attention by States Parties.

- **Categories of assistance resources or capabilities that may be registered, requested and/or offered.** An Article VII database may provide illustrative guidance or examples on the assistance resources or capabilities that may be registered, requested and/or offered, which could for instance include, in addition to logistical and operational aspects, any aspects that may be relevant for responding to the use of a biological or toxin weapon, such as preparedness and protection, detection and mitigation, and prophylaxis and therapeutic treatment.
- **Users and access.** For the establishment of an Article VII database, it would be necessary to determine if the database will be open for users other than States Parties, such as relevant international organizations and other providers of assistance, and to identify the information that may be made publicly available in the database.

Database development

Lessons learned from assistance databases operated in relevant international organizations show that receiving information on best practices, such as the following, would be useful for States Parties when providing guidance on the development of an Article VII database:

- Consider a modular or phased approach for the development of the database to facilitate the early introduction of the tool, with more sophisticated features or functions to be implemented in later phases, taking into account feedback provided by users from States Parties.
- Favour database features that contribute to enhance the visibility of database benefits and the added value of the tool in the context of their work, such as customized search features and downloadable reports.
- Integrate capacity-building and training components in the database concept to address preparedness issues and thereby contribute to the regular use of the database.
- Promote the readiness of assistance resources through the development of guidelines and the regular conduct of simulation exercises.
- Avoid duplication of efforts with other relevant assistance databases and take into account relevant international and regional assistance frameworks, procedures and guidelines for response.
- Choose a user-friendly interface that incorporates intuitive and interactive workflows, as well as attractive functionalities, with periodic updates as well as upgrades taking into account feedback from users.

Database promotion

Lessons learned from assistance databases operated by relevant international organizations show that the consideration by States Parties of mechanisms for promoting regular use and update of the database by users, particularly registration of resources by assistance providers, and for facilitating database use, periodic upgrades, and development phases, would be useful for ensuring the success and long-term sustainability of an Article VII database. An important factor to consider here are the respective roles of the BWC ISU and States Parties in this context.