In line with the requested background information for the Ninth Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, in particular the request for background information on the implementation of Article VII as contained in document BWC/CONF.IX/PC/2, Switzerland submits the following report to States Parties:

No State Party has requested assistance from Switzerland under Article VII, nor has Switzerland invoked the provisions of Article VII to receive assistance.

Switzerland is ready to provide or support assistance under Article VII, provided that its general reservation related to its status as a neutral State is respected, i.e. its assistance within the framework of the Convention cannot go beyond the terms prescribed by that status. Switzerland has personnel, expertise, equipment and infrastructure available that could provide capacities in case of specific requests, depending on their exact nature.

With regard to Article VII, Switzerland considers the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism for the Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM) to be an important operational instrument. Switzerland nominated experts and a laboratory to the respective rosters of the UNSG and regularly updates the information provided. Swiss experts have engaged in numerous activities to strengthen the UNSGM, including specialized expert trainings, table-top exercises, field exercises as well as policy discussions and coordination efforts to further develop and operationalize the mechanism. Since 2015, Switzerland is regularly organising expert workshops geared towards the establishment and furthering of a functional network of trusted laboratories, composed of UNSGM nominated laboratories, for investigations of alleged use of biological and toxin weapons.

Regarding the outbreak of Ebola in Western Africa between 2013 and 2016, Switzerland supported Doctors without Borders (MSF-Suisse) in its work to combat the Ebola epidemic in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the Swiss Humanitarian Assistance financed various direct actions of the Government of Liberia and sent personnel to the region. Also Spiez Laboratory contributed on site to the fight against the Ebola virus in Western Africa through its active participation in the European Mobile Laboratory (EMLab) project which is linked to WHO’s Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN). Renewed on-site assistance by Spiez Laboratory in support of redressing the sanitary situation in Guinea during the renewed Ebola outbreak of 2021 was coordinated through GOARN and EMLab. To fulfil its tasks, Spiez Laboratory relied on its expertise in quality assurance of specialized laboratories for the analysis and diagnosis of highly pathogenic agents (EQADeBa, QUANDHIP, EMERGE, SHARP) and toxins (EQuATox, EuroBioTox). Spiez Laboratory also takes part in WHO quality assurance exercises for pathogens that are within its area of expertise.

In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, Spiez Laboratory together with the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH) established a reliable and quality assured diagnostic test in Equatorial Guinea before the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed in the country.

In 2021, Spiez Laboratory became the first facility of the WHO BioHub system, the purpose of which is 1) the timely sharing of biological materials with epidemic or pandemic potential (BMEPP); 2) to facilitate rapid access and analysis of BMEPP to enable risk assessment and development of effective and safe countermeasures including diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics; and 3) to ensure fair and equitable access to such products by all countries, based on public health needs. Furthermore, Spiez Laboratory is also a trusted laboratory of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Switzerland is an active member of the G7 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. Swiss efforts particularly focus on the Biological Security Working Group and its Signature Initiative to Mitigate Deliberate Biological Threats in Africa.

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1 To quote in full: “By reason of the obligations of its status as a perpetually neutral State, Switzerland is bound to make the general reservation that its collaboration within the framework of this Convention cannot go beyond the terms prescribed by that status. This reservation refers especially to Article VII of the Convention as well as to any similar clause that could replace or supplement that provision of the Convention (or any other arrangement).”