

CONTRIBUTION BY THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE VII OF THE BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION (BTWC)

1. In line with the request for 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, the United Kingdom (UK) provides the following report to States Parties.

2. No State Party has requested assistance from the UK under Article VII, nor has the UK invoked the provisions of Article VII to receive assistance. The UK stands ready to provide or support assistance to any State Party that finds itself exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the treaty.

3. With regard to Article VII, the UK 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. The UK has nominated experts and laboratories to the respective UNSGM rosters whose services could be called upon to assist in an investigation of alleged use of chemical, biological and toxin weapons. UK experts actively participate in UNSGM-related activities, including specialised training courses and exercises, as well as policy discussions aimed at further developing the operational effectiveness of the mechanism.

4. As noted in the Final Declaration of the 8th Review Conference, national preparedness and capacities contribute directly to international capabilities for response, investigation and mitigation of disease outbreaks. In 2018, the UK reported to States Parties about the establishment of its Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST).¹ Consisting of public health experts, scientists and academics, UK-PHRST is on stand-by to tackle outbreaks of infectious disease anywhere in the world within 48 hours. Deployment of UK-PHRST is at the invitation of the host

¹ See The United Kingdom public health rapid support team concept, BWC/MSP/2018/MX.4/WP.2

government or in response to requests made by the World Health Organization (WHO) or by the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN). UK-PHRST also conducts rigorous operational research to improve epidemic preparedness and outbreak responses.

5. The 8th Review Conference Final Declaration also recognised capacity building at the national and international levels as the most immediate imperative for enhancing and strengthening the capacity of States Parties. To that end, during our term as President of the G7 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP) in 2021, the UK prioritised biosecurity and in particular supporting and promoting the Signature Initiative to Mitigate Biological Threats in Africa which was launched in 2020. Together with our co-chair of the GP Biosecurity Working Group, Canada, the UK worked closely with African partners to reduce bio-threats through the aligning of GP activities with African countries working towards the same goals. The Signature Initiative has already delivered tangible results, including identifying four inter-connected priority areas for collective action - i) biosafety and biosecurity; ii) national frameworks; iii) surveillance and epidemic intelligence; and iv) non-proliferation. Each of these priority areas has a sub-working group that is co-led by a GP member country and a partner from Africa.

6. In November 2021, Africa Centres for Disease Control, the Governments of Canada and the UK, and representatives of the Government of South Africa convened a high-level virtual conference on ‘Engaging Public Representatives in Biosecurity and Pandemic Preparedness’ at which African decision makers and parliamentarians discussed key issues with biosecurity experts.² A set of principles was agreed at the meeting.³ In line with Article VII, these principles include developing, applying and maintaining early warning and disease surveillance and detection capabilities that are needed to prevent, detect and respond rapidly to future outbreaks of infectious diseases, whether deliberate, accidental, or natural.

7. During this intersessional process, the UK has authored and co-sponsored a number of working papers concerning effective Article VII responses. These papers

² For a conference overview see <https://africabiosecurity.world-television.com/home/english>

³ For details of the six principles see <https://www.gpwmmd.com/signature-initiative-principles-for-strengthening-biological-security-in-africa>

have particularly emphasised the range of the types of elements that are required in a response, as well as the importance of strong and collaborations with international organisations such as the WHO, OIE and FAO, and other partners. At various points during this intersessional period, we have also stressed the importance of effective command and control. The UKs continues to hold the view that strengthening operationalisation of assistance and response, and improving preparedness so that we might promptly detect and then respond to a biological event in an effective and co-ordinated manner, is of vital importance.