

FACT SHEET

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION¹

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) opened for signature in 1972 and entered into force in 1975. The Convention is a key element in the international community's efforts to address disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It was the first international treaty prohibiting an entire category of such weapons.

Scope of the Biological Weapons Convention

Key provisions of the Convention include binding obligations on States parties:

- to never under any circumstances acquire or retain biological weapons (Article I);
- to destroy or divert to peaceful purposes biological weapons and associated resources (Article II);
- to not transfer, or in any way assist, encourage or induce anyone else to acquire or retain biological weapons (Article III);
- to take any national measures necessary to implement the provisions of the BWC domestically (Article IV);
- to consult bilaterally and multilaterally to solve any problems with the implementation of the BWC (Article V);
- to request the UN Security Council to investigate alleged breaches of the BWC and to comply with its subsequent decisions (Article VI);
- to assist States parties which have been exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the BWC (Article VII);
- to do all of the above in a way that protects and encourages the peaceful uses of biological science and technology (Article X).



2019 BWC Meeting of States Parties

BWC Universalization

The Convention currently has 183 States parties and four Signatory States. More information on joining the Convention can be found on the [BWC website](#).

BWC Implementation

BWC States parties strive to ensure that the Convention remains relevant and effective, taking into account the changes since it entered into force. States parties meet every five years to review the operation of the Convention. The Eighth Review Conference took place in 2016. Since 2002, States parties have developed intersessional work programmes between the Review Conferences that include annual Meetings of Experts (MX) and Meetings of States Parties (MSP). BWC meetings also witness strong engagement from civil society, for example scientific associations, research institutes and NGOs.

Intersessional Programme 2018-2020

The 2017 MSP established an intersessional programme for 2018-2020.² Twelve days were allocated to the intersessional programme each year, with annual MSPs preceded by annual MXs. The five MXs were open-ended and considered the following topics:

¹ For more information: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons>; E-mail: bwc@un.org; twitter: @bwcisu

² The 2020 meetings were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and took place in 2021.

- MX1 Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X (two days);
- MX2 Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention (two days);
- MX3 Strengthening national implementation (one day);
- MX4 Assistance, response and preparedness (two days);
- MX5 Institutional strengthening of the Convention (one day).

States parties may agree upon another intersessional programme at the upcoming Ninth Review Conference in August 2022.

Implementation Support Unit

The Implementation Support Unit (ISU) is housed within the Geneva Branch of UNODA and consists of three full-time staff members. The ISU forms the core of the Secretariat of BWC meetings, receives and distributes Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) submitted annually by States parties, collates details of national measures to implement the Convention, acts as a clearing house for requests for and offers of assistance, interacts with relevant international organizations, scientific and academic institutions and NGOs and attends relevant meetings and events to promote the BWC.

National Contact Points

To facilitate implementation efforts, States Parties are asked to designate National Contact Points (NCPs). These NCPs are individuals or entities responsible for:

- Coordinating national implementation and communicating with other States Parties and relevant international organizations;
- Preparing and submitting the annual CBM reports;
- Exchanging information on universalization efforts.

The ISU has developed a [nomination form for NCPs](#)³ and makes the contact details of all designated NCPs available to States Parties.

Confidence-Building Measures

The system of CBMs was introduced in 1987 with the objective to prevent or reduce the occurrence of ambiguities, doubts and suspicions and to improve international cooperation in the field of peaceful biological activities. BWC States parties should submit their national CBM reports to the ISU by 15 April every year. All CBMs received since 1987 are available to all States parties at <https://bwc-ecbm.unog.ch/>

Assistance and Cooperation Database

The Seventh Review Conference in 2011 decided to establish a database maintained by the ISU to facilitate requests for and offers of exchange of assistance and cooperation among States Parties. The database can be accessed at <https://bwc-articlex.unog.ch/>, where all offers of assistance are publicly available and requests can be accessed by States Parties.

Facts

- The BWC has 183 States parties. A further four States have signed but not ratified and 10 States have neither signed nor ratified. (As of November 2021).
- Over 125 States parties have provided information at least once through the CBM process. More than 80 States parties participate annually. The highest annual participation to date was in 2021, when 92 States parties provided information (As of 18 November 2021).
- 400 to 700 delegates from over 110 States parties participate in annual BWC meetings. These meetings regularly include up to 200 technical experts from around the globe.
- The Ninth BWC Review Conference is scheduled to take place in August 2022.

For more information: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons>

³ <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/BWC-national-contact-point-nomination-form.pdf>