

Global Biological Resource Centre Network
STATEMENT TO THE BTWC SEVENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE

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A Biosecurity Code of Conduct for Biological Resource Centres

A Signal to strengthen the global implementation of the BTWC

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my gratitude to you for the opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the GBRCN, this is the Global Biological Resource Centre Network.

The Final Declaration of the Sixth Review Conference in regard to Article IV reaffirmed *the commitment of States Parties shall take the necessary national measures under this Article and that necessary national measures under this Article ... would strengthen the effectiveness of the Convention*. We welcomed the call that you made for *States Parties to adopt, in accordance with their constitutional processes, legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures, including penal legislation, designed ... to ensure the safety and security of microbial or other biological agents or toxins in laboratories, facilities, and during transportation, to prevent unauthorized access to and removal of such agents or toxins*.

In 2008, the Meeting of States Parties devoted several *working sessions to national, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins (agenda item 6) and to oversight, education, awareness raising and adoption and/or development of codes of conduct with the aim of preventing misuse in the context of advances in bio-science and bio-technology research with the potential of use for purposes prohibited by the Convention (agenda item 7)*.

We especially endorse the outcome of the Meeting of States Parties in 2008 when you recognized that *biosafety and biosecurity measures contribute to preventing the development, acquisition or use of biological and toxin weapons and are an appropriate means of implementing the Convention*.

In order to take such measures, it is necessary to enhance awareness and create a biosecurity-conscious culture. We noted that in your MSP 2008 report *biosecurity refers to the protection, control and accountability measures implemented to prevent the loss, theft, misuse, diversion or intentional release of biological agents and toxins and related resources as well as unauthorized access to, retention or transfer of such material*. And furthermore, agreed on the value of *...applying appropriate risk assessment and risk management strategies*.

The problem in the life sciences is the dual-use potential of bio-resources, associated data and know-how. These can be misused maliciously whether by non-States actors/terrorists or by States. Shortcomings in the effective implementation of the Convention have their origin in ignorance and lack of concern.

Consequently, careful export control, tracking of biological material and observing all transport requirements including the *Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods-Model Regulations* (16th rev. ed.) are essential. It includes security plans for transport of *High Consequence Dangerous Goods* like infectious substances Category A, UN 2814/UN 2900. There is no doubt that the *WHO Biorisk management Laboratory biosecurity guidance* (2006) is an invaluable tool to implement biosecurity. The document uses the expression *valuable biological materials* pointing out strongly the value of biological resources for research and progress.

This alone is not enough to implement effective biosecurity: adequate preventive measures help avoid reactive measures. Biosecurity on the whole is highly complex and it is often difficult for scientists to perceive the dual-use potential of their profession and work. Scientists tend to believe wholly in the bonafide use of bioresources, associated data and know-how. Know-how transfer does not seem critical. The scientific world proclaims total freedom of research and world-wide exchange is essential.

But, biosecurity needs to become an integral part of human activity in the life sciences. Several international, regional and national scientific associations of the life sciences have developed Codes of Conduct or Ethical Codes; generally biosecurity plays an important though not outstanding role in those Codes. Scientific best practice primarily addresses the ethics of the science undertaken; special biosecurity Codes are infrequently found.

Therefore, several Biological Resource Centres decided to elaborate a practice-related Code of Conduct devoted specifically to biosecurity in order to protect their facilities and staff and the world's freedom:

The OECD Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry and the Task Force on Biological Resource Centres (BRCs) realized as early as 1999 that there was a gap to be filled to cover bio-legislation (www.SourceOECD.org). In 2007, the OECD published the *Best Practice Guidelines on Biosecurity for BRCs* including detailed *Qualitative Risk Assessment* and *Risk Management Practices*. This document postulated the development of a Biosecurity Code of Conduct.

With support by the European Commission, the project EMbaRC (**E**uropean Consortium of **M**icrobial **R**esources **C**entres) developed the Biosecurity Code of Conduct (CoC) as it is presented here, in cooperation with the GBRCN, the Global Biological Resource Centre Network, an umbrella initiative for many microbial resource collections around the world. GBRCN has dedicated a task force to address biosecurity, the dual-use problem, export controls and the BTWC. Your MSP 2008 report agreed on the value of *building networks between scientific communities and academic institutions... for appropriate risk communication strategies and tools*. GBRCN is such a network. Its members are legal entities and providers of biological materials which fulfill their mission of delivering bio-resources to authorized recipients within their countries and across borders and continents.

As we recognize the present and future value of the effective national implementation of the BTWC with its high global relevance, and recognizing the rapid scientific and biotechnological developments, we would like to express to the States Parties that the CoC presented here will add value to the objectives of the BTWC. The aim of the CoC is to prevent microbial resource centres from directly or indirectly contributing to malicious misuse of biological agents and toxins, including the development or production of biological weapons and shall promote a basic ethical understanding of science compliant with the BTWC. We also consider that such a generally applicable

type of a Code can substantially help all States Parties because awareness raising is absolutely crucial in the scientific world. The Code as presented is far-reaching, going beyond the GBRCN community. Indeed most countries have microbial resource collections, with different holdings, infrastructure and risk potential. However, BRCs are not only biological resource centres but also biological research centres.

The GBRCN require that this CoC shall be implemented by BRCs all over the world. It is designed in such a manner that similar scientific and bio-medical institutions and, on a higher level, scientific associations and societies can use the CoC to demonstrate their will to strengthen the BTWC.

In conclusion, our message and recommendation to the Seventh Review Conference is that States Parties should, as part of their consideration of improving the national implementation of the Convention, agree to adopt a comparable Code of Conduct for their national microbial resource collections and other institutions in the life sciences because of the awareness raising focus on biosecurity that it provides. We recommend that States Parties activate and involve their legal authorities in a top-down process of communication with their life sciences institutions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to give a statement on behalf of GBRCN

A poster will also be presented and provides further information on details of the CoC, on projects and initiatives involved. Copies of the CoC and accompanying documents are available at the poster.

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