First Meeting
Geneva, 10 – 14 November 2003

Meeting of Experts
Geneva, 18 – 29 August 2003

Items 5 and 6 of the provisional agenda

Security of Dangerous Pathogens and Toxins

Prepared by the United States of America

Background

1. At the resumed Fifth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) the States Parties decided, by consensus, to hold an annual meeting of the States Parties of one week duration each year commencing in 2003 until the Sixth Review Conference, to be held not later than the end of 2006, to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on five separate topics. Each meeting of States Parties will be preceded by a two-week meeting of experts. The meetings of experts will prepare factual report describing their work, and the Sixth Review Conference will consider the work of these meetings and take decisions on recommendations. Biosecurity has become a major international issue and the Expert Group should recommend that the Annual Meeting of States Parties urge expansion of existing biosecurity guidelines by the World Health Organization (WHO), Office Internationale des Epizooties (OIE), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

2. Two topics were identified for work in 2003. One of these topics is “national mechanisms to establish and maintain the security and oversight of pathogenic microorganisms and toxins.” This paper summarizes the recommendations of the United States with regard to this particular topic.

Overall Approach

3. Work in preparation for the Sixth Review Conference should involve the Expert Group developing general recommendations for consideration by the annual meetings of States Parties. The 2003 Experts Group meeting should:

   a) receive and compile information from States Parties on their national biosecurity measures;

   b) receive information from the WHO, the FAO and the OIE on any current international guidelines for biosecurity;
c) recommend that the meeting of States Parties request the WHO, FAO, and OIE, to expand or develop, as necessary, their voluntary guidelines for security that will reduce the risk of illicit or malicious diversion of Dangerous Pathogens and Toxins (DPTs);
d) recommend that States Parties continue to enhance their national biosecurity efforts.

4. In the event that the WHO, FAO, and/or OIE has already drafted appropriate guidelines on security of dangerous pathogens and toxins, and that the report on those guidelines is available before the experts meetings, the United States recommends that the experts group take account of the guidelines in any recommendation that States Parties enhance their national biosecurity efforts.

Possible Expert Group Recommendations to the 2003 Meeting of States Parties:

Development of Biosecurity Guidelines

5. The United States proposes that the Experts Group recommend the States Parties request the World Health Organization (WHO) to expand as necessary its voluntary biosecurity guidelines and to communicate these guidelines to the global community. Those guidelines would include both the procedures for ensuring security of dangerous pathogens and toxins, and the scope of such measures. The United States also proposes that the Experts Group encourage the Office Internationale des Épizooties (OIE), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), to expand or develop as necessary, voluntary biosecurity guidelines in their areas of equity. As the security of dangerous pathogens overarches the areas of these three organizations, the BWC States Parties should encourage the WHO, FAO, and OIE to explore development of consistent sets of voluntary guidelines to recommend to the global community.

Adoption of Necessary National Measures for Enforcement of Biosecurity of DPTs.

6. The Experts Group should recommend that each State Party establish national measures necessary to provide for the security of DPTs, at or above those voluntary guidelines recommended by the WHO, OIE, and FAO. These national measures should address, at a minimum:

- determination of which facilities currently possess DPTs within its national boundaries;
- national registration and regulation of facilities that can acquire, use, store, transfer, and dispose of DPTs;
- establishment of specific requirements for achieving adequate protection of DPTs;
- measures to ensure the safe, secure, and reliable transport of DPTs without unduly inhibiting public health and other peaceful purposes.

Identification of National Bodies to Oversee Biosecurity

7. The Experts Group should recommend that each State Party designate those national governmental entities that are responsible for ensuring the security of DPTs, including the proper monitoring and enforcement of national laws and rules regarding the security of these
agents. The responsibility may be assigned to existing governmental entities or to a newly established national entity. Governments are also encouraged to develop a list of internal experts to advise them on national implementation guidelines on technical and legal matters.