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I. Biological Weapons Convention: Meetings and other activities held during 2019

1. Each year from 2018 to 2020 States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) convene a two-day Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness (MX4) , in the framework of the BWC intersessional programme (ISP).¹ This topic relates to efforts to strengthen the operationalization of Article VII of the BWC, pursuant to which States Parties undertake to provide assistance in case of the use of biological weapons. However, the operationalization of this provision presents a number of major challenges.

2. The Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) has been officially invited to attend BWC meetings in order to strengthen collaboration and enhance information exchange on this important aspect. Accordingly, a representative from the Secretariat of the IPPC participated in the 2019 MX4, which was held from 6 to 7 August in Geneva, Switzerland. He addressed delegations in the context of the agenda item relating to the “Exploration of means to prepare for, respond to and

¹ The 2018-2020 intersessional programme consists of annual Meetings of States Parties over four days, which are preceded by five thematic annual Meetings of Experts with a total duration of eight days.



render assistance in case of the possible hostile use of biological agents and toxins against agriculture, livestock as well as the natural environment.” The representative delivered a presentation on the IPPC’s surveillance, contingency plans and eradication programme to response to the possible intended use of plant pest in agriculture and forestry. The IPPC representative also contributed to a side event organized by Canada on the contribution by relevant international organizations to the response in case of the possible hostile use of biological agents and toxins against agriculture, livestock and the natural environment. The IPPC Secretariat was also represented at the 2019 BWC Meeting of States Parties, which was held from 3 to 6 December. The Meeting *inter-alia* addressed the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations.²

3. Several delegations expressed their appreciation of the contribution by the IPPC during MX4 and the MSP and invited further discussion on this area. At the same time, noting that the United Nations General Assembly declared 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health, some States Parties proposed to devote particular focus to plant health issues at MX4 in 2020.³

4. During 2019, activities continued in the context of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) project on “Strengthening global mechanisms to respond to deliberate use of biological agents,” which the BWC Implementation Support Unit coordinates with funds from Canada. The project focuses on the roles and cooperation among relevant offices, department and funds of the United Nations and other international organizations, including humanitarian actors, to support States in their response to a deliberate disease outbreak. The project addresses this question particularly through the lens of Article VII of the BWC, and the indication from BWC States Parties that they would expect the United Nations to play ‘an important role in coordinating, mobilizing and delivering the required support and assistance’ in such circumstances, with the help of *inter alia* the appropriate international organizations, ‘in accordance with their respective mandates’.⁴ States Parties referred specifically to the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), and the IPPC. The IPPC Secretariat, together with 18 relevant UN offices, department, programmes and funds, as well as other relevant international organizations, has been contributing actively to the project activities.

² The report of the 2019 Meeting of States Parties is available at

[https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/A2B6057BC864E9BFC12584C9002E2BC4/\\$file/BWC+MSP+2019+final+report+-+advance+version.pdf](https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/A2B6057BC864E9BFC12584C9002E2BC4/$file/BWC+MSP+2019+final+report+-+advance+version.pdf).

³ The report of the 2019 MX4 is available at <https://undocs.org/BWC/MSP/2019/MX.4/2>.

⁴ BWC/CONF.VIII/4, Final Declaration, Article VII, para. 39.