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## THE BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION

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The 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC or BWC) is an international treaty that prohibits its 163 member states from developing or otherwise acquiring biological weapons, or from assisting anyone else to do so. It covers biological weapons affecting humans, animals or plants. For much of the BWC's history, member governments were chiefly concerned about the threat of state-based covert biological weapons programmes. They discussed compliance, verification and response in similar terms as for nuclear or chemical weapons: on-site inspections, regular monitoring of high-risk facilities, restrictions on transfer of certain materials, and so on.

Since 2001, international concern about the threats posed by terrorism, coupled with the very rapid pace of development in biological science and technology, has resulted in a reorientation of the activities of BWC members. Members recognised both that traditional arms control approaches could not hope to effectively monitor thousands of small biotechnology laboratories around the world, and that the deliberate development and use of a biological weapon was one end of a continuous spectrum of biological risk that also included naturally occurring disease, unintended consequences, accidents, lack of awareness, and negligence.

Through a work programme conducted since 2003, BWC member governments have attempted to harmonise and coordinate efforts across this spectrum of risk. The programme has brought defence and security experts together with representatives of the public health, veterinary, agriculture, law enforcement, and education sectors, as well as with the international scientific community and commercial industry. The work programme includes topics highly relevant to OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, such as biosafety/biosecurity, education and awareness-raising, and codes of conduct.



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