

Twenty-Ninth Session of the Conference of the States Parties (CSP-29) to the Chemical Weapons Convention, The Hague, The Netherlands, 25-29 November 2024

NGO Statement: Addressing the chemical and biological security education gaps

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Chairperson, Director General, Distinguished Delegates, CWC Coalition Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Director General stated in his Inaugural Address to the recent Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Advancing Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Morocco “biology and chemistry are becoming increasingly interrelated.”ⁱ This perspective underpins our work on biosecurity education at Biological Security Research Centre at London Metropolitan University.

Like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with its International Nuclear Security Education Networkⁱⁱ, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has promoted chemical security education through its Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO)ⁱⁱⁱ for a number of years. Moreover, The Hague Ethical Guidelines^{iv} with their strong educational element provide a context for chemical security education.

State Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) have also provided strong support for the recent development of the Tianjin Guidelines^v related to the BTWC, but as we have shown in a detailed survey^{vi}, while there have been numerous biosecurity education projects over the last 20 years, these have not been linked and sustained in an integrated way. Moreover, there are clearly significant problems in developing and implementing effective biosecurity education such as the lack of material in languages other than English, but there are ways to overcome these problems such as the use of cartoons with necessarily limited amounts of text^{vii}.

However, we think that the network development approach of the IAEA/INSEN and OPCW/ABEO is probably the best way of developing a biosecurity education system that can link and learn from the various initiatives being carried out around the world and therefore we have obtained a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, UK for a two-year project intended to build the foundations for such an International Biosecurity Education Network (IBSEN)^{viii}.

This project aims to help lay the foundations of a framework for widespread biosecurity education. This education is necessary and a key element to raise awareness among life scientists of the risks of scientific research with dual-use implications. However, there is a clear lack of education on these issues in the scientific community and other stakeholders within civil society. The IBSEN will provide tools to fill this gap.

As its first step, we recently published a resources book “*Essentials of Biological Security: A Global Perspective*” describing its potential as a pivotal tool in addressing this gap^{ix}. We have

now started to work with various partners to translate the book into different languages and thus help to use it in biological security projects.

The IBSEN seeks an integrated, collective and collaborative approach to address the biosecurity education. In its the first and second Newsletters ^x, careful comparisons were made of the developments of the International Nuclear Security Education Network (INSEN) and the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) to draw lessons for the International Biological Security Education Network (IBSEN). These lessons and good practices from INSEN and ABEO were summarised to assist with the development of global biosecurity education. Later IBSEN Newsletters will further investigate other biosecurity education work by other international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). Combined with our implementation of several biological security education projects, we hope to provide a handbook of delivery and evaluation methods.

In the longer term, the sustainability of the network will be pursued through a continuous engagement of its members and collaborating work with other initiatives, particularly with INSEN and ABEO. We believe that it is essential to develop global biosecurity education.

We thank you for your kind attention and request this statement be made part of the official published proceedings of this Conference.

Word count: 607 [Excluding heading and footnotes]

ⁱ <https://www.opcw.org/media-centre/speeches-and-statements>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.iaea.org/services/networks/insen>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.opcw.org/about/subsidiary-bodies/advisory-board-education-and-outreach>

^{iv} <https://www.opcw.org/hague-ethical-guidelines>

^v https://www.interacademies.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Tianjin-Guidelines_210707.pdf

^{vi} <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bsheal.2022.08.003>

^{vii} <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jobbb.2022.03.001>

^{viii} <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jobbb.2024.09.002>

^{ix} <https://popups.uliege.be/2952-7597/index.php?id=128&file=1>

^x <https://ibsen.org.uk/newsletters/>