

13. Chemical and biological security threats

Overview

Health and security concerns raised by the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa pushed global public health towards the top of the international security agenda in 2014 (see section I). Shortcomings in national and international preparedness for managing emerging infectious disease threats were evident, and the response capacities of some national public health systems in West Africa and of international organizations (e.g. Médecins Sans Frontières) were stretched beyond their limits. Furthermore, delays and inefficiencies in response efforts occurred as states and international bodies, most notably the World Health Organization (WHO), worked to agree priorities on how to implement a more coordinated approach. These efforts also underscored the uneven implementation of the WHO's revised 2005 International Health Regulations.

States continued to develop strategies to prevent and remediate the effects of the possible misuse of toxic chemicals and of biological materials during 2014; some of these strategies fall within the context of environmental and human health, while others fall within the security and defence spheres. The principal legal instruments against chemical and biological warfare are the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

The states parties to the BTWC met twice in 2014. The meetings mainly consisted of an exchange of views and experience with a focus on: cooperation and assistance in the life sciences for peaceful purposes; a review of science and technology developments; and strengthening capacity to assist those potentially threatened by biological weapons (see section II). Perhaps the most notable development, particularly with regard to the Eighth Review Conference that will be held in 2016, was a proposal by Russia that called for a reconsideration of treaty compliance issues. The proposal was based on work carried out from 1992 until 2001 that was never agreed.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) kept up its work of verifying adherence to the CWC. At the 19th Conference of the States Parties to the CWC, the OPCW continued to verify the completeness and correctness of Syria's declarations on, and destruction of, its chemical weapons (see section III). It also coordinated an international cooperative effort to remove chemical agents from Syria and conducted a fact-finding mission, which concluded that chemical weapons—most likely chlorine—were used again in Syria in 2014. The OPCW's operations in Syria provide an

insight into the challenges posed to verification in the major conflict zones of Iraq, Libya and Syria (see section IV).

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