
**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Development,
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their
Destruction**

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting
their deliberations, including possible outcomes**

**Building Confidence through Transparency: Peer Review
Transparency Visit at the Richard Lugar Center for Public
Health Research of the National Center for Disease Control
and Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia**

**Submitted by Georgia and Germany, co-sponsored by Austria,
Belgium, Columbia, Iraq, Hungary, Malaysia, Mali, the United
Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States
of America**

I. Introduction

1. The voluntary demonstration of national implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) may help boost confidence in States Parties' compliance with and commitment to the BTWC. To this end, and following previous peer review visits hosted by France in 2013, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg in 2015, Germany in 2016 and the Kingdom of Morocco in 2017, Georgia decided to host a peer review transparency visit at the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research (Lugar Center) of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) in Tbilisi.

2. The Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva in its letter dated 24 July 2018 invited all States Parties to the BTWC to participate in this peer review visit. The upcoming visit was also announced during the BTWC Meetings of Experts in Geneva (7-16 August 2018). 17 States Parties from all three regional groups, among them many of the co-sponsors of this working paper, accepted this invitation. Financial support by the German Federal Foreign Office allowed for a non-discriminatory and diverse representation. In their final report, annexed to this working paper, the visitors appreciated the "significant transparency" demonstrated by the facility.

3. This fifth on-site visit demonstrated once more that it is possible to reconcile a high level of transparency with the legitimate security and intellectual property interests of the visited facility. It is thus expected that voluntary transparency initiatives will continue to advance the ongoing search for innovative and concrete ways to increase confidence in the implementation of the BTWC in the absence of any verification procedures. The States Parties submitting this paper are convinced that the diverse array of peer review visits and other transparency initiatives all provide valuable tools to increase confidence in compliance and commitment to the BTWC and will be happy to further discuss and develop their concrete forms and benefits.



4. The intersessional process until the 2021 Review Conference provides an ideal platform for these reflections. The decision of the 2017 Meeting of States Parties specifically encourages States Parties to consider ‘various ways to promote transparency and confidence building under the Convention’ in the context of the Meetings of Experts on ‘Strengthening National Implementation’.

5. At this year’s Expert Meeting, a large number of States Parties highlighted the various benefits of voluntary transparency visits. It was noted that this voluntary and in-depth exchange of information and experiences not only strengthens trust and transparency and provides some level of reassurance about compliance with the BTWC. It also helps improve national implementation and provides opportunities for enhanced cooperation and the exchange of scientific knowledge, serving as a critical connection between the theoretical discourse on implementation, concrete legal frameworks and every-day procedures.

6. In addition, recommendations on the further development of these activities included the creation of a compendium of all relevant transparency initiatives and the development of a voluntary assistance fund. The States Parties submitting this paper see great value in a structured exchange of best-practices and lessons-learned, and will be happy to share and discuss their own experiences with other interested States Parties to expand and develop these initiatives.

II. The visit

A. Objective

7. The primary objective of this visit was to demonstrate that the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health complies with the provisions and obligations of the BTWC and that its activities are fully in line with stated peaceful purposes and the information provided in the relevant Confidence Building Measures (CBM) form.

8. Peer review visits and other transparency initiatives are no substitute for verification. This broadly shared understanding has been repeated in every discussion since the advent of the transparency initiative in the BTWC. It has also been elaborated in a working paper entitled “Confidence building and compliance – two different approaches” submitted to the seventh Review Conference (BTWC/CONF.VII/WP.14).

9. In opening a BTWC-relevant facility to all interested States Parties and demonstrating once more that such an on-site visit can enhance confidence in compliance with the BTWC Georgia moreover hopes to encourage other States Parties to conduct similar visits.

B. The Visited Facility

10. The visit took place from 14 to 15 November 2018 at the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research (Lugar Center) of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) in Tbilisi, Georgia. The Lugar Center is a civilian facility working with BTWC-relevant pathogens and declared under the CBM submitted by Georgia. It has the first BSL3 laboratory established in the region, as part of the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction programme, led by Senator Richard Lugar, but is now owned and operated by the Government of Georgia. The Lugar Center serves both Georgia and the wider region. It offers detection and diagnostic capacities in regards to endemic and exotic diseases, like Dengue or Chikungunya, and is equipped to conduct bio-surveillance on natural foci – Tularemia, Anthrax and other zoonotic diseases.

C. Participants

11. A total of 19 experts and diplomats from the following countries participated in the peer review: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Germany,

Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mali, Montenegro, Myanmar, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. In addition, one representative each from the European External Action Service, the BTWC Implementation Support Unit and civil society (King's College London) participated as observers. Financial support for travel and accommodation was provided upon request by the German Federal Foreign Office, thus ensuring a non-discriminatory approach. The only prerequisite stipulated in the invitation was that participants had to be willing to comply with the appropriate safety regulations for entering biological laboratories.

D. Format and Method

12. The visit was preceded by a welcome ceremony and a briefing on the NCDC's mission and research activities. Additionally, NCDC staff provided an introduction to the facility provisions and the mandatory safety briefing. For operational reasons, during the first day of the visit, the visitors were split into two teams of equal size, which both completed the same tour of the facility. On the second day, four experts received the stipulated security briefings and entered the BSL-3 laboratory, while the rest of the group examined the facility's premises and surrounding buildings, such as warehouses and an administrative complex. The visit was concluded by a closing session including further discussions, a summary, and a final assessment.

13. All attending participants were escorted on site and were able to assess all aspects of the facility that are relevant to provisions of the BTWC and provided on the CBM form, comprising laboratory activities and equipment, infrastructure, security measures including access control, laboratory conduct, and documentation in relation to research and development, as well as procedures for the transfer and export of pathogens and toxins.

Visit proceedings allowed for:

- Examination of laboratories, other rooms, laboratory equipment and installations
- Requests for visual access to paper documents;
- Interviewing of personnel;
- Requests for photographs and the determination of geographical coordinates.

E. Outcome

14. The visiting team recorded its findings in a concluding summary report, which is presented in Annex. II. The report was drafted by the Malaysian expert in her role as team leader and finalized jointly by the visiting team. The hosts did not contribute to drafting the summary report. The report found that the "facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities." The visiting team moreover "observed nothing that was inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes."

15. Georgia and Germany will be co-hosting a side event during the 2018 Meeting of States Parties with the aim of sharing the insights gained from conducting this peer review visit with all States Parties to the BTWC. The structure, content, and lessons learned will be presented in detail.

Annex I

Program of the Visit

	<i>Day 1</i>	<i>Day 2</i>	<i>Day 3</i>	<i>Day 4</i>	
10:00 –11:30 hrs	Arrival	MoH: Welcome address MoFA: Objectives of the Peer Review Transparency Visit Group picture	Tour of the premises Conversations with staff	Visit to the BSL-3 laboratory Participants: 4 selected experts	Return trip of the visitors (on an individual basis)
11:30 –13:00 hrs	Arrival	NCDC: Mission, research activities, WRAIR Safety briefing			
13:00-14:00		Lunch Break	Lunch Break		
14:00 – 15:00 hrs	Arrival	Tour of the facility	Report on visit to the BSL-3 laboratory		
16:00 – 18:00 hrs	Welcome Presentation of the program & the facility provisions Selection of team leader & visitors to the BSL-3 laboratory	Conversations with staff	Discussion, assessment Finalization of the visit report Closing session with facility representatives		
18:00 hrs	Icebreaker	Wrap-up session of the day	Joint dinner		

Annex II

Report of the Visiting Team

Peer Review Transparency Visit: 14-15 November 2018

1. The visiting team comprising 22 experts and observers visited the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research (Lugar Center) of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) on 14-15 November 2018. Access was provided to all areas of the site, including all spaces used by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), a tenant unit of the Lugar Center. The assessment was conducted by splitting the visiting team into two groups, which both completed the same tour of the facility, including all BSL-2 laboratories. In addition, four experts from the visiting team accessed all areas of the BSL-3 laboratory.
2. The methods applied by the team included: visual examination of laboratory activities and equipment, mechanical systems, storage and administrative areas, infrastructure and security measures; visual access to paper documents and electronic records; interviewing of laboratory personnel; demonstration of the Pathogen Asset Control System (PACS); and procedures for pathogens and toxins control and transfer. Information provided in the 2018 Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) submission and other information provided, as well as that observed during the visit, was taken into account.
3. The size of the laboratory areas, number of personnel, scientific disciplines represented in the scientific/engineering staff, and information on types of pathogens and toxins handled and studied in the facility were consistent with the information provided in the CBMs and other information provided to the visiting team.
4. Physical security measures included secured perimeter fencing, surveillance and monitoring system, security checks, security guards and several layers of access control (access cards, PIN code, biometrics devices, keys, etc.) to prevent unauthorised access to sensitive areas. Staff and visitors are required to wear identification badges. All visitors are required to complete the Visitor Access Request form at least 72 hours in advance and are escorted on site. All staff, including contractors and cleaning and maintenance staff, must undergo security vetting on a regular basis.
5. All the equipment and infrastructure observed was relevant to the prophylactic, protective and other peaceful research and diagnostic purposes stated by the visited facility. Several laboratories are accredited to international standards such as those of ISO and WHO. Biosafety and biosecurity measures were demonstrated to meet international standards.
6. Pathogens handled by the facility are kept in a repository and the process for access control and inventory management, including auditing, was explained in detail to the visiting team. A demonstration of the Pathogen Asset Control System (PACS) was also given to the team. The pathogen strains held are consistent with use for prophylactic, protective, and other peaceful purposes. The Center has trained personnel certified by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to prepare and ship hazardous materials. Decontamination processes and waste management procedures are in place and were explained in detail.
7. Documentation was also provided to the team upon request, including national legislation relevant to the implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), quality and biosafety manuals, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on emergency response and training, biosafety committee meeting records, maintenance records, staff training records (technical, biosafety, biosecurity, emergency drills, etc.), and agenda and schedules for training on dual-use bioethics, including BTWC obligations.
8. Staff were made available for interviews and to answer questions throughout the visit. This included maintenance, engineering, security, administration and operational staff, in addition to the relevant scientific and technical experts. Throughout the visit, all laboratory

personnel and escorts were very engaged and responsive to questions and requests for access to facility areas, documentation and information. These interactions allowed exchange of best practices on a number of occasions. Laboratory staff indicated a desire to participate in international External Quality Assurance Exercises in the future.

9. Procedures for biosafety, biosecurity and dual-use research; handling and transport of pathogens and toxins; biosafety and biosecurity education and awareness programs; and other measures mentioned demonstrated commitment to implementing the obligations under Articles III and IV of the BTWC. Information was also provided on regional and international assistance and cooperation activities relevant to Article X of the BTWC.

10. The facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. The visiting team observed nothing that was inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes.

11. The visiting team thanks the staff of the Lugar Center and NCDC, the escort team and all other officials involved for their welcome and cooperation given to the visiting team.
