

# The Geneva Forum

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A Joint Initiative of:

Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies, IUHEI

## Civil Society Monitoring

*Comparing experiences, exploring  
relevance to biological weapons*

NGO Expert Meeting

21-22 March 2002

Geneva, Switzerland

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SUMMARY REPORT

## Acknowledgements

The Geneva Forum partner organisations are grateful for the generous support of the Ford Foundation that made this workshop possible

## 1. Introduction

On 21-22 March 2002, the Geneva Forum brought together 34 experts from a range of civil society organizations to discuss their efforts to increase transparency in their respective fields. The aim of the meeting was to allow non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on biological weapons (BW) issues and interested in setting up a new BW monitoring and transparency project to learn from the experiences of the other projects. The workshop was an important milestone for the NGO initiative, helping to identify various options for and further shape the planned monitoring project. Preparatory work towards the launch of this new project got underway under the auspices of the Geneva Forum on 1 February 2002. Below is a brief background of this initiative.

A group of NGOs began to pursue the idea of a monitoring and transparency project in the area of biological weapons in the latter half of 2001, after the threat of biological weapons and bioterrorism had hit the public consciousness like never before. Anthrax mailings killed five people in the United States and terrorized the public around the world. Regrettably, 2001 was also a year during which international efforts to deal with the problem of biological weapons suffered serious setbacks. The international negotiations on a compliance Protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) came to a halt in the summer after nearly seven years of meetings in Geneva. Although the anthrax attacks highlighted the need for action against the biological weapons threat, diplomatic efforts continued to languish. The Fifth Review Conference of the BWC, held on 19 November - 7 December 2001, was suspended on the last day in disarray and without agreement on a Final Declaration due to a disagreement over the future of the Ad Hoc Group charged with negotiating the Protocol. As a result, there is still little transparency between countries about their biological weapons capabilities and the 1972 Convention still lacks any means to monitor compliance.

Troubled by the lack of governmental action, the setbacks to the BWC and the violation of the norm against the use of BW, a group of eight well-known NGOs working on biological weapons and the Geneva Forum began to pursue the idea of forming a new civil society monitoring project in support of the biological weapons ban. The founding organizations are: the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), UK; the Centre for Conflict Resolution, South Africa; the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, UK; the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), USA; the Geneva Forum; the Harvard Sussex Program (HSP), Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Sussex, UK; the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES), Germany; the Sunshine Project, USA-Germany; and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), UK.

To prepare the ground for the initiative, the founding NGOs initiated a 'feasibility and methodology study' on how civil society could best support the biological weapons ban by monitoring developments and increasing openness in relevant areas. Preparatory work on the initiative, supported by the Ploughshares Fund and the Carnegie Corporation, began on 1 February 2002 under the auspices of the Geneva Forum, who offered to organize a workshop on "Civil Society Monitoring: Comparing experiences, exploring relevance to biological weapons" in support of initiative. This report presents a summary of the main topics discussed and views expressed at the workshop, summarizing also its main conclusions and recommendations for the project.

## 2. Civil Society Monitoring: Some examples of effective action

In the first two sessions of the meeting, four established civil society monitoring projects discussed how they came into being and the important lessons they learned along the way. All four presenters paid particular attention to the early days of the process and the international political context at the time, the goals the projects set out to achieve and the practical tasks of producing their main publications, forming partnerships, doing media work and securing funding.

### Landmine Monitor

Mary Wareham presented the Landmine Monitor project, a civil society monitoring initiative by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). The Landmine Monitor, which has been published annually since 1999, tracks implementation of and compliance with the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The Landmine Monitor system was developed and coordinated by a core group of five NGOs (Human Rights Watch, Handicap International, Kenya Coalition Against Landmines, Mines Action Canada and Norwegian People's Aid) that recognized the need for an independent reporting and evaluation mechanism on topics surrounding landmines. The core group had a clear goal of creating a report that would document countries' actions on landmines (policy, use, production, transfer, stockpiling, mine clearance, mine awareness and survivor assistance). The Landmine Monitor report utilizes the ICBL network and its work is based largely on reports from researchers on the ground (in-country research). Human Rights Watch has the responsibility of collecting the country reports and compiling and editing the report. Landmine Monitor has developed a research kit and style guide to aid the network of researchers. Landmine Monitor seeks to provide factual information and is critical but constructive in its analysis. As a rule, any controversial pieces of information need to be backed by three different sources and countries are given a chance to respond to such information. The Landmine Monitor is funded by governments. The production of the first edition got underway before funding was secured. Media work has played an increasingly important role in the work of the Landmine Monitor.

### Small Arms Survey

Keith Krause summarised the birth and evolution of the Small Arms Survey, established in 1999. Small Arms Survey developed out of a growing consensus in the NGO community that the wide availability of small arms was a serious problem and that there was a lack of independent information on this problem. A group of likeminded NGOs and national governments coalesced around the ideas that: 1) greater transparency was a precondition to raising 'comfort levels' with the idea of dealing with problems surrounding small arms, 2) better information and analysis on policy implications were needed, and 3) the project required a multidisciplinary approach in order to capture and report accurately on the scope and nature of the problem. Small Arms Survey faced a challenge in collecting and analysing information that did not really exist before and therefore needed to develop its own methodology. The production of the first edition took about 18 months. Small Arms Survey organized a big public launch for its first book. Stakeholders of the project include members of the small arms research community, NGOs and like-minded governments. Small Arms Survey has been government funded from its inception.

### Transparency International

Jessica Berns of Transparency International (TI) recounted how a former World Bank official, motivated by his belief that the Bank's funding was not finding its way to intended targets, founded TI in 1993 in order to battle international corruption. Transparency International is committed to building broad coalitions and is politically impartial. Its principal tool in the fight against corruption is access to information. At the international level, TI monitors compliance by governments, corporations and banks with multilateral conventions (such as the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions). On a national level, it monitors performance of key institutions. It evaluates and systematically analyzes the state of corruption around the world each year in the "Global Corruption Report," published annually since 2001. TI has a central governing body

(International Secretariat) and 80 national chapters that do most of the monitoring work. TI has an established system of data collection and verification, including an information reliability scoring mechanism. TI makes its findings available to the public through its publications and website. Furthermore, it considers interaction with international media key to building awareness about global corruption. TI is funded both by public and private sources.

### Military Balance

Military Balance, an annual publication by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), has been published since 1958. Terence Taylor told the workshop participants that Military Balance was initially focused only on providing information on military capabilities of the Warsaw Pact and China but that it has since developed into a report on military forces and expenditures in nearly 170 countries around the world. Military Balance does not take positions or do advocacy work but was designed to provide objective and factual information. Military Balance faced a challenge in this area. Gathering information was problematic because of the mixture of open and closed sources and because governments varied in their willingness to disclose information involving national security. Military Balance's readership includes government officials, academia, private investors, legislators and parliamentarians. The first editions were produced with the support of foundations but it has since become self-supporting, generating funds through membership, the sale of its various reports and contracted research. Military Balance pays a lot of attention to its relations with the press. Prominent publications such as the Economist and the New York Times have subscribed to the publication.

### 3. Monitoring Biological Weapons & Biotechnology: What is being done, what needs to be done?

The Sunshine Project's Jan van Aken presented a paper entitled, "Survey: Current Activities Related to BW". Van Aken reported that the twenty-one organizations working on BW or related issues that took part in the survey were doing valuable work on biological weapons issues. However, they lacked coordination and comprehensiveness. Most organizations had a very narrow focus and were largely based in the West (particularly in the United States and United Kingdom). Jan stated that important topics such as BW possession, development, and proliferation, biomedical advances and their implications for BW and industry monitoring were not getting enough attention even though these topics were cited as being important in the survey. In summary, strengths of the current activities were: strong scientific background; very good contacts and access to not-really-open sources; many comprehensive websites and self-published journals; in-depth knowledge of US activities; two well established global (media) monitoring schemes. Weaknesses of the current activities were: lack of coordination; randomly selected and isolated research projects; little work on BW possession and proliferation, on technology assessment and on industry; lack of non-English publications and non-US/UK organisations.

The organisations participating in Jan's survey made a number of suggestions regarding the possible focus for the BW monitoring project. Ranked in order, they proposed that the project monitor and report on biodefense research (mentioned 6 times); developments in biotechnology relevant to BW (4); national measures/legislation to prevent BW (3); technology and organism transfer (3); industry (3); aerosol work (2); academic research with pathogens (2); compliance with BTWC; allegations of non-compliance; biosafety and bioethics; past BW; programmes/prevent proliferation and brain drain; disease surveillance. Furthermore, they proposed that the project maintain a list of scientists working in relevant fields; define the meaning of verification and analyse intent; define and implement technical analysis; explore new monitoring sources and techniques and study how to overcome shortcomings of the compliance Protocol negotiations.

The presentation of the survey results inspired an exchange of views during which participants discussed the role they envisaged for the proposed project, trying to distinguish between its overall goals and practical tasks. Participants brainstormed on the question of what issue areas the project should cover and focus on. Suggestions included biodefense work; bioscience and technology research and developments; codes of conduct; confidence building measures (CBMs); disease surveillance; industry; multilateral processes; national legislation and regulations; non-compliance; offensive BW capability, research and development; and transfers of know-how, materials and technology and export controls. Given the multitude of topics, it was felt that some clustering was necessary.

Participants also discussed some of the practical problems involved in covering these areas, including access to, translation and analysis of CBM declarations; industry reservations about transparency and concerns over loss of commercial propriety information; and challenges associated with reporting about possible non-compliance in the absence of benchmarks (which the Protocol was to create) and with the difficulty of assessing intent. Furthermore, participants questioned how comprehensive the project could be in monitoring the various issue areas and in covering the world. Some argued for a more modest start with an initial focus on a smaller number of countries and gradually building-up to become more global, whereas others felt the project needed to be as non-selective and as wide in its approach as possible from the start. Moreover, it was important to ensure that countries that were more open than others were not 'penalized' for disclosing information and surrendering it for public evaluation.

Beyond monitoring, participants discussed how active the project should and could be in other areas such as advocacy, assistance and public education, thereby moving the discussion from the identified gap areas to the central question of the overall goals of the project. Participants saw as the overall goal of the project the eradication of biological weapons and the strengthening of the norm against them. The project could support these goals through monitoring and research, promotion of effective government action and by building private sector participation and public support for the biological weapons ban. With this in mind, the workshop participants continued to further define the different tasks for the project, considering also what resources were needed.

#### 4. Organizing the Work

Workshop participants continued their deliberations in four smaller groups, which were given the assignment of identifying specific tasks for the project and the means, methods, structures and resources necessary to carry out those tasks. The groups reported back to the group the following findings:

Group 1 developed ten specific tasks for the project: Acquiring and analysing confidence building measures (CBMs) that countries submitted to the UN each year and producing a 'report card' on the CBMs. Other tasks included looking into terrorist BW capabilities, monitoring research and development (biotechnology), identifying and recruiting new project partners (especially in underrepresented countries). Other more practical tasks included building a project website, producing a preliminary publication (report or digest) for the launch of the project in November 2002 as well as developing a communication strategy. Group 1 saw the project as a clearinghouse where issues of interest could be shared through a list serve and thought it was important that the project publish materials in different languages. It envisaged the project holding regional meetings and workshops as a way of building local BW expertise and monitoring capacity. It saw a need for a 'secretariat' to coordinate research and to handle administrative issues. Funds needed to be raised to establish the secretariat, to commission research reports and to arrange regional seminars/workshops.

Group 2 also saw the CBMs and other politically binding obligations as a starting point for monitoring and reporting activity. It suggested that the project, at a later stage, commission researchers on ground to report on how different countries implemented those obligations in various parts of the world. Group 2 suggested that the project work towards the Review

Conferences of the BWC and publicize its efforts from the beginning. It thought it was important to identify local partners who could provide information for the project and act as local advocates. Furthermore, Group 3 emphasised the need to conduct media work as a means of pressuring governments to fulfil their obligations. Group 2 also proposed the establishment of a project secretariat.

Group 3 saw monitoring and the production of a monitoring report, networking, public outreach and fundraising as the project's core tasks. It envisaged an annual report that included both country and thematic studies. Some of the thematic studies could be constant and some could vary from year to year. Group 3 thought monitoring should focus on CBMs, industry, multilateral processes and legislation. It highlighted the need for doing public outreach work. The group suggested that the project establish a central office, an advisory board and a coordinating committee. The project office staff would act as the coordinating and production team and the advisory board would give overall strategic advice to the project. The coordinating committee needed to be representative of the organizations participating in the project and have a flexible structure.

Group 4 saw the enhancement of the BWC as the project's overarching goal, both in the governmental and private sector (industry). In track one (government), the group proposed that the project draw up and submit a questionnaire to governments asking for information on their CBM declarations and on the implementation of the Convention and Review Conference decisions. The group envisaged that regional experts (NGO and individuals on the ground) analyse the responses to the questionnaire. The core group would review and publish the reports. In track two (industry), the work pattern would be similar, with first a survey, then an analysis, review and finally, publication of the findings.

## 5. Conclusions and Next Steps

Following the group presentations, Jenni Rissanen, project coordinator for the initiative, summarized the discussions and common elements. Jenni thought there was agreement that the project's goal was to make a new and unique civil society contribution to efforts to prevent the development and use of biological weapons. The project was to achieve that by monitoring and by creating greater openness and awareness about issues and developments that were relevant to the ban on biological weapons.

The starting point for the monitoring activity would be the collection and analysis of the CBMs countries are required to submit to the UN each year. Additional areas that could be monitored included implementation of politically binding obligations (BWC Review Conference decisions); the creation, adoption and implementation of relevant legislation and regulations; and developments in science and technology and industry issues, which were not covered under the CBMs and politically binding agreements. The project would publish the results of its monitoring work primarily in an annual publication and on its website.

Beyond monitoring and publishing, the project should build a global network of partners that could participate and contribute to the project's activities and build awareness of the BW issues around the world. Another important project task was outreach. It was agreed that the project should arrange seminars and workshops both for networking and capacity building purposes and that the project should raise public awareness about the project's activities and publications and BW issues in general by interacting actively with the media. Participants had also generally agreed that there was a need for a project office with a small staff, to act as a central coordination point.

Jenni then pointed out that there were a number of practical issues that needed further consideration, including funding and structural questions (project office and staff). Participants discussed these issues at the end of the second day and made a number of other practical suggestions. Overall, participants differed in their views on funding by governments. Some were concerned that government funding might hinder the project's credibility and independence.

Others were in favour of government funding, arguing that it was both possible and important to form partnerships with governments in order to engage constructively with them and to gain their support for the project's aims. Furthermore, they pointed out that the private funding situation was not encouraging at the moment. The Landmine Monitor, Small Arms Survey and Transparency International were referred to as successful projects that did not suffer from credibility problems even though they were funded by governments. Although participants did not reach common agreement on the question of funding, some suggested that the project could for example choose carefully which governments and agencies to approach for support and that it could start with private funding and only later on apply for government money. The project could also limit its governmental support to specific parts of the project (such as the annual report and seminars) rather than asking for core funding. In addition, some suggested that the project consider approaching industry for support.

Participants also briefly discussed the project's institutional structure and the project's launch. Participants considered whether a centralised (Small Arms Survey) or a decentralised (Landmine Monitor) structure would be more appropriate for the project and discussed the different implications on communications, networking, funding etc. Participants agreed on the importance of a well-planned, public project launch and presence in multilateral fora. There was a suggestion, supported by everyone, to publicly introduce and launch the project at the continued session of the Fifth BWC Review Conference in November 2002 and to prepare an introductory report or publication for distribution to states parties and the press at this event.

The workshop concluded with participants indicating whether they wished to become involved in the project. All participants showed great interest in the project, with some already listing ways in which they could participate, including conducting research, providing contacts and raising awareness.



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