

Raising Awareness on Dual-use Issues

Lead academy: Polish Academy of Sciences

Dual-use research or dual-use technology is defined in both politics and diplomacy as that which can be used for either peaceful or military purposes. There is thus a great deal of international interest in monitoring which countries and/or laboratories are involved in dual-use research and its implications for non-peaceful purposes. Since 2011, when the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS) was awarded a grant from IAP on 'Education in Biosecurity: Raising Awareness on Dual-use Issues', PAS has been taking the lead in these activities within the inter-academy network. In 2013, PAS received a second grant from IAP.

International consultation

On 26-28 February 2013, a delegation from PAS attended the World Health Organization (WHO) 'Informal Consultation on Dual-Use Research of Concern' in Geneva, Switzerland.

The objective of this meeting was to share perspectives on key issues related to dual-use research of concern (DURC), identify existing approaches and safeguards for managing DURC, and to consider critical gaps and actions to initiate. Andrzej Górski, vice president of PAS and coordinator of the programme on biosecurity, took part in the consultation and served as the rapporteur for a working group on education and outreach that was part of the consultation.

This was followed by a second meeting, also held in Geneva, from 12-16 August 2013, relating to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction.

The Polish delegation comprised six individuals, including Ryszard Słomski, who acted as a delegate and a non-governmental organization representative on behalf of IAP and PAS.

The main issues considered at this Meeting of Experts encompassed (i) strengthening of cooperation and help on the basis of Article X of the Convention; (ii) a review of achievements in science and technologies connected with the Convention; (iii) how to strengthen cooperation between countries; and (iv) how to increase participation in the so-called 'confidence-building measures'. Słomski presented the viewpoint of the Biosecurity Working Group (BWG) of IAP, as well as presenting a lecture on 'Advances in Technologies for Detection of Infectious Diseases'.

A Polish delegation comprising five representatives, again including Słomski, also attended the Meeting of State Parties in Geneva on 9-13 December 2013. During this meeting, a special session was dedicated to 'Consolidating Biosecurity Education'. Session participants used the opportunity to update the outputs of the workshop, 'Promoting Education on Dual Use Issues in the Life Sciences', hosted by PAS in Warsaw, Poland, in 2009 with the collaboration of IAP and other international bodies.

Outreach

As well as providing input into international agreements and debates, the working group hosted two information events during 2013.

The first of these was a working session of the IAP BWG held in Warsaw on 5 December 2013.

Every time a new experiment is to be carried out, a risk assessment must be performed and documented by the researcher, in consultation with the supervisor. To

provide training in these processes, a half-day workshop was organized on 'Biological Risk Assessment' for microbiologists, epidemiologists and public health experts working in the Military Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology. Ali Mohammadi, president of Global Health and Security Consultants, gave a detailed presentation on the objectives and processes of risk assessments. During the workshop, participants worked on three public health risk case studies and at the end, group coordinators presented their evaluations of the cases, which were followed by discussions involving all the participants.

The following day, 6 December, also in Warsaw, the working group held a seminar on the subject 'Natural or Deliberate Outbreak: How to prevent or detect and trace its origin – biosecurity, surveillance, forensics'. The main goal was to promote cooperation between the public health sector, law enforcement officers and other authorities responsible for security issues. The framework for the seminar was prevention, rapid identification of the source of an outbreak, and the tracing of its origin. It was an excellent opportunity to exchange opinions and experiences among the experts present about epidemic surveillance and microbial forensics, as well as about educational programmes on biosafety and biosecurity concerns.



Ryszard Słomski, member of the Polish delegation to the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, presented the views of the IAP Biosecurity Working Group, and gave a paper entitled 'Advances in Technologies for Detection of Infectious Diseases'.



Participants at the Meeting of the State Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction - Meeting of Experts; Geneva, Switzerland; August 2013.