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Office of Special Projects  
S/890/2011  
20 January 2011  
ENGLISH only

**NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT**

**REPORT ON THE TABLE-TOP EXERCISE  
ON THE PREPAREDNESS OF STATES PARTIES  
TO PREVENT TERRORIST ATTACKS INVOLVING CHEMICALS  
WARSAW, POLAND, 22 AND 23 NOVEMBER 2010**

1. In April 2010, the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) informed States Parties about preparations for a table-top exercise on the preparedness of States Parties to prevent terrorist attacks involving chemicals, which was being prepared together with the Government of Poland (S/835/2010, dated 19 April 2010). Preparations for the table-top exercise included a preparatory meeting, which was held at OPCW Headquarters on 20 and 21 September 2010 (S/853/2010, dated 28 June 2010).
2. The table-top exercise took place on 22 and 23 November 2010 in Warsaw, Poland, and involved 150 participants, including over 70 international representatives from 24<sup>1</sup> countries, and representatives of 14 international and regional organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs)<sup>2</sup>. The audience of the exercise represented a broad spectrum of relevant national and international stakeholders, including law-enforcement agencies, institutions undertaking forensic analysis, export-control authorities, institutions involved in the provision of legal assistance, as well as local, regional, and central government authorities.
3. With this note, the Secretariat would like to inform States Parties about the results of the exercise and possible follow-up measures. Relevant documentation concerning the table-top exercise has been placed on the OPCW’s website: [www.opcw.org](http://www.opcw.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Albania, Algeria, Australia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Germany, India, Iraq, Italia, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States of America.

<sup>2</sup> The European Commission, the European Police Office (EUROPOL), the Finnish Institute for Verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (VERIFIN), the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (OAS-CITCTE), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the United Nations 1540 Committee, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC).



### **Basic framework**

4. The table-top exercise was an element of Project VII of the EU Council Decision 2009 of 27 July 2009 on the preparedness of States Parties to prevent and respond to attacks involving chemicals. It aimed to contribute to the development of the capacities of national industry and local, regional, and national governmental agencies/authorities to reduce the risks of a terrorist attack involving the use of toxic industrial chemicals. This included preventing terrorist access to materials, equipment, and knowledge that could be used in the development and production of chemical weapons.
5. The table-top exercise was jointly prepared and organised by the Government of Poland and the Secretariat. It examined cross-government decision making, information exchange, and the conditions to be met in order to receive assistance from relevant national and international organisations in preventing terrorist attacks against chemical plants. The players of the exercise were representatives of the different agencies and authorities at the local, provincial, and State levels that have responsibilities with regard to prevention, preparedness for, and response to such incidents. Other participants included experts from other States Parties and from regional and international organisations; these participants acted as observers and were encouraged to comment on the exercise as it unfolded, explain their own organisation's procedures and responsibilities, and present their own experiences as they related to the exercise.
6. The core expertise during the exercise was provided by experts from Australia (Ministry of Defence), the Netherlands (National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Ministry of Justice), Poland (Internal Security Agency, Government Security Centre, and Ministry of the Interior), and the United States of America (Federal Bureau of Investigation).
7. A terrorist attack at a chemical plant involving the release of toxic chemicals formed the basic scenario of the table-top exercise. The scenario provided for the destruction of a 20 tonne chlorine container at a chemical plant as a result of the terrorist attack, with a toxic chemical plume quickly threatening the population of a nearby city. The exercise addressed different stages of the prevention of, preparedness for, and response to the unfolding crisis. These included counterterrorism, border control, and law-enforcement measures; the actions of first responders; local, regional, and national crisis management; the mobilisation and organisation of national-level support for the local authorities as their crisis-management and response capacity became overwhelmed; bilateral and regional cooperation in counterterrorism, law enforcement, and crisis management; and the solicitation of international assistance.
8. The table-top exercise was conducted under the following conditions:
  - (a) Political, social, and economic conditions in the exercise were the same as those found in the real world; and
  - (b) Participants used real-world data and/or their professional judgement in the absence of information provided by the scenario.

9. The following assumptions underpinned the planning for the table-top exercise:
  - (a) The scenario was plausible;
  - (b) The location was fictitious;
  - (c) Participants were expected to be well-versed in their own organisation's response and recovery plans and procedures; and
  - (d) Implementation of specific organisational response plans and procedures indicated actions that are expected to occur under actual response conditions and, therefore, provide a sound basis for analysis.
10. The programme of the table-top exercise also included presentations on the available experience and expertise in the countries of the region and in the relevant international organisations that can be offered to the States Parties. Furthermore, a series of specialised workshops took place in parallel with the exercise, covering the following subjects:
  - (a) Enhancing chemical-security awareness among stakeholders;
  - (b) Sampling and analysis at the crime scene;
  - (c) Improvised chemical devices; and
  - (d) Media landscape in a crisis involving chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) weapons.

#### **Results of the table-top exercise and lessons learned**

11. The exercise fully met the objective stated in the project documents. The results of the exercise were based on initial evaluations during the exercise: at several points during the exercise, the participants (players as well as observers) were invited to comment on the measures taken by the players, and to present their own experiences with regard to how the unfolding situation could be managed. Upon completion of the exercise, participants joined a lessons-learned discussion, which was summarised during the final plenary session of the exercise. Finally, a post-exercise evaluation took place in order to identify lessons learned, and proposals for future action were developed. The main points raised in the various evaluation steps are given below.
12. A first general point was that the exercise scenario needs to be seen in the broader context of enhancing capacities to mitigate risks emanating from CBRN threats. At the national level, there was a need for a holistic and integrated CBRN approach. It is therefore important that national action plans and measures to enhance response capacity address the full spectrum of threats.
13. As a second general point, it was noted that the response to terrorist (as well as other) releases of a toxic chemical differs from the response to certain other threats, such as the release of biological or radiological agents, in that the response time available to save lives is very short (a matter of hours). The local response capacity, as well as any support that can be provided at short notice, was of paramount importance.

Resources that are located further away and would take a considerable time (days) to be moved into the crisis zone would normally not be able to support the response operations. Although they may still be relevant for subsequent remedial and restoration measures, this aspect did not form part of the exercise.

14. A third general point was that in the area of preparedness and response, national measures that have been adopted for reasons other than counterterrorism, including measures to cope with industrial and transportation accidents or environmental catastrophes, form an integral part of the national capacity to mitigate CBRN risks. The exercise showed how resources, technical means, and procedures established to respond to industrial accidents can effectively be utilised to save lives after a terrorist release of a toxic chemical. It was also noted, however, that terrorism scenarios are likely to include additional features and aspects that are not common to response scenarios for industrial or environmental incidents, and that these need to be taken into account in response planning and execution (for example, the threat to the first responders emanating from the presence of armed terrorists).
15. The exercise demonstrated the value of conducting table-top exercises as a tool for reviewing existing procedures and capacities to mitigate the risks of chemical attacks by terrorists; identifying the responsibilities, roles and capabilities of the different national stakeholders that are part of the response; testing the effectiveness and dependability of existing preventive measures; training and improving the interaction between agencies and authorities involved in the threat mitigation; and identifying gaps in the national system of prevention, preparedness, and response, enabling remedial action to be taken as necessary.
16. An important aspect of generating lessons learned with the help of the table-top exercise was the preparatory process of the exercise. This work required interaction and coordination between a number of national, regional, and local agencies and authorities that in day-to-day life have fairly few routine interactions, as well as clarification of their responsibilities, mandates, legal authority, and operational capabilities.
17. The preparation and conduct of the table-top exercise highlighted the importance of the existing legislative and regulatory framework. Such exercises can be powerful tools with which to identify regulatory gaps and uncertainties that may hinder the effective performance of and coordination between the authorities and agencies involved, create obstacles for information sharing, create uncertainties about command and control, or result in legal difficulties with regard to apprehending, detaining, charging, prosecuting, and punishing terrorist suspects.
18. The table-top exercise also created a useful platform to review and improve the interaction between the different national agencies and authorities involved in the countering of terrorist threats involving toxic chemicals. As mentioned above, many of these agencies and authorities have only limited interaction on a day-to-day basis. This potentially poses problems related to interoperability, command and control, the identification and implementation of lead roles, effective and timely information exchange, and other issues. The preparation for the exercise compelled agencies to review their internal and inter-agency arrangements for communications, information

sharing, and operational coordination. This is essential for ensuring that any shortfalls and problems identified in the course of an exercise can be subsequently rectified.

19. The exercise, supported by the workshops accompanying it, demonstrated the need to identify and address any operational tensions between different actors and processes (for example, the need for law enforcement to collect and preserve forensic evidence may be in conflict with the need of the first responders to protect and save lives and render the incident scene safe—issues related to this aspect were further elaborated in one of the workshops). Without practical exercises, such conflicting mandates may remain undetected until a real incident occurs, when they would have to be resolved against the time pressure of a real situation with lives at stake.
20. Another issue that became evident during the exercise was the need for the first responders and the crisis-management team to be able to bring in, whenever required, specialised expertise (“reach-back”). Whilst first responders such as fire brigades, law-enforcement agencies, or emergency-response medical teams have some degree of specialised knowledge to hand on site, crisis management will at times require access to specialised technical expertise that is not available at the site of the incident. It is therefore important that the responding agencies have instant access to national as well as regional or international networks of well-established experts in relevant disciplines, who can provide technical advice on measures to be taken (to remedy a situation, to identify a threat, to preserve essential evidence, and the like) without delay.
21. The preparation and conduct of the table-top exercise created a framework for the different local, provincial, and government bodies to communicate and exchange information (including operational data), understand their different responsibilities, roles and mandates, and establish networks amongst their members. Such networking is essential for effective planning and crisis management.
22. An issue that surfaced at several points during the exercise, and which was further illuminated during one of the accompanying workshops, was the importance of adopting and implementing an effective public information strategy. Experience from previous crisis-management situations has amply demonstrated the need for as accurate and timely information dissemination as possible, consistency of messages, clarity and authority of information broadcasts, and constructive engagement with the media.
23. The exercise highlighted the need to make advance arrangements for the necessary bilateral, regional, and international cooperation and coordination. This is necessary, *inter alia*, in order to facilitate information exchanges and operational coordination. Examples that arose during the exercise included the arrangement of cross-border cooperation in prevention and response, the sharing of information (including intelligence) with bilateral, regional, and international partners as and when appropriate, and the exchange of notifications and information during the crisis-management phase. The latter included a number of mandatory notification procedures that have been established at the regional and international levels in the context of arrangements unrelated to counterterrorism.

24. The exercise also highlighted practical considerations and conditions that need to be taken into account when planning bilateral, regional, and international cooperation and assistance measures to respond to threats of terrorists using toxic chemicals. Given the nature of such incidents of chemical terrorism, the emphasis should be on prevention and preparedness, and international assistance should strongly focus on capacity building at the national and local levels to strengthen domestic capacities and response systems. In an actual crisis situation, international assistance will be time-critical, and means of enabling swift access to relevant expertise and knowledge (experts as well as information depositories) may be particularly relevant to support operations.

### **Security at chemical plants**

25. Participants in the exercise reaffirmed concerns that chemical facilities may become subject to attacks or other incidents that could lead to the release of toxic chemicals, or to their diversion/theft and acquisition by non-State actors. They highlighted the importance of the issue of security in the area of legitimate production, transportation, and use of chemicals. The risk of terrorist attacks using the toxic properties of industrial chemicals adds urgency to the problem. Enhancing a chemical-security culture will provide greater assurances that the national chemical-security systems can carry out their functions of preventing, detecting, and responding to theft, sabotage, unauthorised access, and illegal transfer of chemical materials from their associated facilities and means of transport.
26. Participants have also encouraged the OPCW to serve as a platform of support for global cooperation in lessening the chemical threat by promoting awareness of chemical-security best practices and fostering cooperation between chemical professionals. To this end, the OPCW has been encouraged to continue to develop relations and partnerships, as appropriate, with relevant regional and international organisations, including international organisations related to chemical safety and security, chemical-industry associations, and the private sector and civil society.

### **Conclusions and future steps**

27. The exercise confirmed the need for States Parties to adopt measures to review their status regarding prevention, preparedness, and response to terrorist incidents involving toxic industrial chemicals, to integrate these measures with preparations they have already made to mitigate risks associated with chemical accidents and environmental incidents, and to address CBRN terrorism risks in a comprehensive fashion. With regard to future OPCW activities, this comprehensive approach calls for effective coordination with other relevant agencies such as the CTITF, Europol, the IAEA, the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Interpol, UNICRI, and the United Nations, as well as regional organisations and relevant NGOs such as SIPRI and VERTIC.
28. The table-top exercise demonstrated the value of developing tools for States Parties to evaluate their existing systems of prevention, preparedness, and response and to take remedial steps as necessary. Such exercises help identify and remedy problems and deficiencies in national response systems. They are important for putting into place, providing training on, and improving procedures, coordination, and

information-sharing mechanisms. They have great merit for advancing bilateral, regional, and international cooperation and they create conditions and arrangements that will facilitate the provision of assistance to victims of chemical attacks.

29. The responsibility for adopting measures to fight the threat of terrorism, including with regard to the possible use of toxic chemicals, remains firmly with the States. At the same time, the nature of the OPCW as a global treaty organisation provides opportunities for global cooperation and outreach that go beyond the reach of bilateral arrangements or regional measures and organisations. Combined with its competence, and within the resources available to it, the OPCW could continue to provide a platform for States Parties to exchange experiences and share information relevant to the prevention, preparedness for, and response to terrorist uses of toxic chemicals, at the regional and subregional levels, with multi-stakeholder participation and in a multidisciplinary fashion.
30. At the level of OPCW programme activity, the exercise has demonstrated the usefulness of the OPCW's developing programmes and projects that support national capacity building in States Parties in the area of prevention of, preparedness for, and response to the evolving threats of terrorist uses of toxic industrial chemicals. Possible areas in which the OPCW could provide a forum for States Parties to consult, cooperate, and exchange experiences and information could include, for example, the development of policy guidance and assessment tools, of technical guidelines and decision-making tools, the provision of assistance with exercises and training, the facilitation of access to specialised expertise and knowledge, the provision of assistance with awareness raising, and working with stakeholders.
31. The table-top exercise conducted in Poland was an example of the kind of activities that States Parties (at the national level or within a subregional or regional context) may wish to consider conducting, and for which the OPCW can help with the preparation and conduct. To this end, the Secretariat could review the different materials used in the exercise, and prepare a "template" for similar exercises that other States Parties may wish to undertake. To support States Parties that wish to prepare and run such an exercise in the future, the Secretariat could, upon request:
  - (a) Make available a basic exercise scenario and help adapt it to the situation, conditions, and requirements of the State Party planning to run the exercise;
  - (b) Help with the identification of all relevant stakeholders in government and industry, from the local to the national level, and advise on how to clarify their role, responsibilities, and operational capabilities and constraints within the exercise scenario;
  - (c) Help with the planning, preparation, and conduct of the exercise;
  - (d) Facilitate access to technical expertise from other States Parties that could support the exercise, as well as make such expertise available from its own resources;
  - (e) Assist with the cooperation and coordination of activities with other States Parties (for example on a regional basis) that may decide to participate in the exercise; and

- (f) Help with the evaluation of the exercise, the extraction of lessons learned and the identification of practical measures that the State Party may consider adopting to further enhance its capacity.
32. In addition, the Secretariat is reviewing other possibilities for it to offer States Parties the opportunity to develop and improve cooperation with each other, with the aim of enhancing their capacity in the field of prevention of, preparedness for, and response to chemical attacks by terrorists. The Secretariat will inform States Parties in due course about its proposals for such future actions.
  33. As emphasised in the statement by the Director-General during the ministerial session of the table-top exercise, the exercise was not a stand-alone event, but launched a programme on the promotion of the OPCW as a platform for consultations and cooperation, both bilaterally and on a regional basis, on ways to prevent terrorists from acquiring and/or using chemical weapons.

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