

IAP Biosecurity Working Group Meeting

16 September 2015
Polish Academy of Sciences
Warsaw, Staszic Palace

MINUTES

Participants:

Ryszard Słomski - Poland
Jo Husbands - USA
Katherine Bowman - USA
Sue Meek - Australia
Sergey Netesov - Russia
Zabta Shinwari - Pakistan
Mikhail Ugryumov - Russia
Sergey Zavriev - Russia
Sergio Jorge Pastrana - Cuba
Marcin Kawałowski - Poland
Grzegorz Graniak - Poland
Marlena Szalata - Poland
Urszula Wajcen - Poland

The meeting was opened by R. Słomski who welcomed all participants on behalf of A. Górski who could not be present.

The meeting started with the presentation of R. Słomski on the activities of the BWG in the years 2013-2015. The following events were organized by the BWG:

- S&T Trends Symposium to support the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) PAS, Warsaw, 13-15.09.2015
- Meeting of Experts UNOG, Geneva, 10-14.08.2015
- Advances in Design and Use of Microbial Production Systems. A Workshop for the BWC Community, Geneva, 9.08.2015
- Meeting of States Parties UNOG, Geneva, 1-5.12.2014
- Meeting of Experts UNOG, Geneva, 4-8.08.2014
- Understanding host-pathogen interactions: application to novel therapeutics. A workshop for the BWC meeting of Experts, Geneva, 3.08.2014
- Conference Dual use of innovative technologies, Poznań 16.05.2014
- Meeting of States Parties UNOG, Geneva, 9-13.12.2013
- Seminar Advances in technologies for surveillance, detection, diagnosis and mitigation of infectious diseases and similar occurrences caused by toxins in humans, animals and plants: an international forum on biosecurity, Warsaw, 6.12.2013
- Workshop on Public Health and Biological Risk, Warsaw, 5.12.2013
- Meeting of Experts UNOG, Geneva, 12-16.08.2013

In the tour de table that followed R. Slomski's presentation Jo Husbands emphasized that IAP authorities are very much satisfied with the activities of the group and with the involvement of participating academies. J. Husbands mentioned several side events organized on the occasion of Geneva meetings devoted, among others, to the gain of function controversy. S. J. Pastrana confirmed that the IAP authorities, being satisfied with the achievements of the group, decided that BWG activities will be continued, although the IAP funding tends to be diminished. In the opinion of M. Kawałowski, representing Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BWG group is the example of a very valuable and well organized cooperation which was and will be actively supported by the Polish government. Next year the Ministry will co-organize a very important conference in Poland, with the emphasis on political aspects of BTWC.

In the next item of agenda Zabta Shinwari presented the lessons from Pakistan in practicing ethics in science. Z. Shinwari highlighted the role of Higher Education Commission in visible development in science sector: the number of universities tripled during the recent 13 year, the number of PhD output increased considerably. Pakistan is one of the leading countries in plant biotechnology. Pakistani researchers identified major threats to the biodiversity: release of the synthetic organisms in the environment; how synthetic organisms might evolve in the natural environment and the consequences of synthetic organisms exchanging genetic materials with naturally occurring organisms. There have been important developments in recent years in Pakistan.

Sergey Zavriev reported that the Russian government attaches a great importance to the biosecurity problems, especially in the areas of agriculture, food and ecology. He also informed that the Russian government decided to organize in 2018 and fund (about \$40 mil) the National center of potential bio hazard monitoring (<http://russian.rt.com/article/79257>). Also the information about problems of the importance of monitoring the agricultural production, including seeds, food and feed stuff contamination with quarantine pathogens, toxins and seeds of quarantine weeds was mentioned and discussed. He also mentioned that one of the important topics related to the monitoring methods of all genetic material (quarantine pathogens like viruses, bacteria, fungi, insects, weed seeds and other) and its diagnostic and identification should be standardized for all BTWC participant countries. Those issues are widely discussed on international arena, there are many papers resulting from this debate, many conferences devoted to this topic were organized, but in fact nothing has changed in the recent years, there is no progress. S. Zavriev asked the BWG members what can be done, what measures should be taken to change this situation. In the opinion of R. Słomski education and raising awareness in biosecurity problems is crucial. There are not enough programs for students about dual use issues. S. Zavriev pointed out that actually nobody is responsible for preparing response to this kind of

problems. According to M. Ugryumov the set of recommendations in biosecurity issues should be elaborated.

S. Zavriev suggested that the IAP group or its representatives' participation at the BTWC meeting in Geneva in 2016 would be important. Probably the best we could do to reach the goal is to send a corresponding notification to the meeting organizers.

Sergio Jorge Pastrana stressed that the Cuban Academy of Sciences has been one of the first members of the BWG – since 2003. It incorporated the codes of conduct discussed by the group (also including nanotechnology). The Cuban Academy established the National Committee of Ethics in Science and devoted much attention to educational activities in the field of ethics, especially at postdoctoral level. It has also been engaged in science diplomacy.

Sue Meek reported about the evolution of Australia's defence export control system. Defence Department of Australia developed legislation which was criticized by the research community. As a result of a campaign led by researchers the Parliament asked the Defence Department to restart the work on improving legislation. As a result of major consultations held by one side by the Defence Department and on the other by the Chief Scientist of Australia, with the active participation of the Australian Academy of Sciences in both groups, there has been some changes in the legislation and the Defence Export Control Office within the Department of Defence was established. It elaborated a very clear guidance in legislation and led to better understanding of basic research. It is important that thanks to this office the communication between the research community and the society in Australia is now much easier.

Sergey Netesov presented the information about bioethics initiative in central Asian countries. He informed that on 1-6 June 2015 near Dushanbe, Tajikistan the International seminar "Education and Increase of Dual Use Science Awareness" and Bioethics training took place. Specialists from Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), Russia, Great Britain, France, Pakistan, Georgia, Armenia participated at the meeting. It was also attended by the representatives of WHO and ISTC. The main subject discussed was the situation in bioethics education and the implementation of international regulations in the Central Asian and CIS countries. During the debates the absence of the bioethics textbook of international level in Russian and in local languages was highlighted. As a result of the seminar the important decisions were made, including: creating a specialized international Working Group for the development of international educational program on Biosafety and Bioethics in life Sciences and preparing the statement for all countries of the region - participants of the Seminar - including the offer to modify regional regulations, laws with the purpose to increase the levels of biosafety, biosecurity and bioethics regulations in this region.

Kate Bowman made a proposal to ask the academies who have not endorsed the 2005 IAP Statement on Biosecurity to do so in order to make it possible to present a “renewed” statement on the occasion of the Eight Review Conference to be held next year. It was stressed that it might be helpful to involve regional networks in this process. The members of the group expressed their support for this initiative. It was decided that the letter to be signed by co-chairs of the IAP would be drafted and would be then sent out to all IAP members.

Another matter raised by Kate Bowman was a possible extension of the membership of BWG. Some current BWG members do not engage in the activities of the group, so attracting new members seems worth considering. Commenting this proposal S. Zavriev suggested that each BWG member should contact the government in its country in order to ask it to get involved in the cooperation with IAP and allocate special funds for this purpose, especially that the means that the IAP has at its disposal are very small. An example of the involvement of national agencies in sponsoring IAP is a grant for the TRENDS workshop given by US government. In the opinion of M. Ugryumov each BWG member should try to find the information about existing funding instruments (e.g. agreements on scientific cooperation) and should look for new ways of financing of BWG activities.

U. Wajcen informed the BWG members that IAP grant for the activities of this group is due to end this September. M. Ugryumov said that there would be a meeting of all important foundations in Rome in November this year and it might be advisable to present a letter from the BWG/IAP. S. J. Pastrana stressed that a letter requesting further financial means for the BWG activities should be submitted to IAP authorities urgently. M. Ugryumov added that the information about the activities of the BWG and Trends workshop could be presented during the oncoming STS Forum. M. Ugryumov offered his assistance in this matter.

Kate Bowman announced that there would be no workshops in Geneva next year due to the preparations for the Eight Review Conference.

Under the last agenda item Kate Bowman requested the BWG members to send the Polish Academy of Sciences the materials/information to be published at the BWG website.

Concluding the meeting R. Słomski expressed a hope that the BWG would obtain funding for the continuation of its activities and that new members would join the group.