

The 'mechanism' itself was essentially a virtual one, comprising lists of experts nominated by states to be available for fact-finding missions; a list of laboratories available to do sample analysis; and guidelines for the conduct of missions agreed by a group of experts in 1989. The UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA) was requested to maintain the lists. The guidelines contain information on assessing whether to proceed with a particular fact-finding mission, inspection techniques and modalities, expertise that it would be useful to have on a mission and procedures for accrediting laboratories for analyse samples.

The Secretary-General has made use of the mechanism on several occasions, in relation to alleged chemical, biological or toxin use in Afghanistan and Indochina (1981 and 1982); Iran (1984-1986, 1988); Iran and Iraq (1986), Iraq (1988); Mozambique and Azerbaijan (1992). In the Afghanistan and Indochina cases, as the fact-finding team was not permitted access to the states concerned it could only conduct interviews and sample analysis in neighbouring states. Iran and Iraq each granted access during their eight-year war to allow verification of alleged CW use by the other country. The government of Azerbaijan itself invited a fact-finding mission on its territory to help it to prove its compliance.

The mechanism remains available, but has atrophied. The lists of experts and laboratories were last updated in 1989.³⁵ In advance of the BWC Experts Meeting in July 2004 the UNDDA requested member states to help update them, but few have responded. Meanwhile the UK has proposed several ways of reviving the mechanism, with particular attention to BW, given that verification of allegations of use of CW is now possible under the CWC.

Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)

The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention has no verification system and only weak compliance provisions. Each state party is obliged to take steps nationally to ensure that it complies with the treaty, such as passing national implementation legislation, but there is no multilateral body to encourage and monitor such efforts. Despite decades of efforts these shortcomings have not to date been rectified.

Efforts to close the verification gap

In 1986 the US rebuffed a formal Soviet proposal for a verification protocol to the BWC. In 1991 French-led Western pressure for improved verification led to a compromise, whereby a technical and scientific study of possible verification measures was launched.³⁶ The Ad Hoc Group of Verification Experts (VEREX), which met from 1992-93, identified, examined and evaluated 21 initiatives, concluding that a combination of on-site and off-site measures was worth pursuing. In 1994 a Special Conference of States Parties, after considering the VEREX report, established a new, more political, Ad Hoc Group (the AHG). Open, like VEREX, to all states parties, the AHG was mandated to consider appropriate initiatives, including possible verification measures, and to draft proposals. These would be incorporated, as appropriate, in 'a legally binding instrument', which was assumed would be a protocol to the BWC.

³⁵ UN document A/44/561, 4 October 1989.

³⁶ See Nicholas Sims, 'Verifying biological disarmament: towards a protocol and organisation', in *Verification Yearbook 2000*, VERTIC, London, 2000, pp. 93-94.