

Comments on ELBI and the BWC

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It's a pleasure to be here with you all to discuss the role of NGOs in supporting the Biological Weapons Convention. Today, I'm going to give you a brief introduction to the Emerging Leaders in Biosecurity Initiative, or ELBI; talk a little bit about ELBI's limited but very promising interaction with the BWC, as well as some of our ideas for future engagement; and close with a few more general comments on how NGOs – and specifically think tanks – can contribute to the work of the BWC.

Just to say a few words about the Center for Health Security for those of you who may not be familiar with us. We are a think-tank located in Baltimore that focuses on producing original research and policy analysis on a range of preparedness and biosecurity issues. Our Center was founded prior to 2001 by Dr. D.A. Henderson due primarily to his concerns about the potential use of biological weapons against civilian populations. As a result, our Center's mission is closely aligned with that of the BWC.

One of my responsibilities at the Center – and indeed it's been one of the most gratifying – is to support ELBI.

ELBI is a highly competitive, part-time fellowship that we started 5 years ago with support from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. The impetus for ELBI came from two observations. First, nuclear non-proliferation efforts benefit from analogous programs. Second, very simply, that our national and global health security would benefit from the presence of a cohort of rising professionals who are attuned to and aware of the challenges we all face on a daily basis.

ELBI is our way of contributing to the Biosecurity workforce, and facilitating the path for talented individuals to pursue a career in Biosecurity. The goal of ELBI is really to build and maintain a network of graduate students and early to mid-career professionals from the variety of fields that collectively feed into health and biosecurity, to include bio-medical researchers, public health professionals, policy experts, and others. We take roughly 28 Fellows per year, and we have a total of 81 fellows in the alumni network. We're also very lucky to have international representation as well, as we accept four Fellows each year from the United Kingdom and Canada.

During their Fellowship year, ELBI Fellows are invited to two multi-day workshops where they meet, exchange ideas and perspectives, and are briefed by current leaders in the field, including those representing the White House, State Department, and Department of Defense. A variety of networking and virtual events rounds out the year's activities.

There is a general overview of the program. Now, related to the BWC, at the end of last year, two of my colleagues, Dr. Gigi Gronvall and Crystal Boddie, accompanied five of our fellows to Geneva to take part in the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP). There, they made a statement to the assembled delegations regarding ELBI, held a side event where they presented

preliminary findings from a study that was and is relevant to the BWC (I'll talk more about that in a moment), and met with ambassadors and their delegations to discuss their priorities for the meeting and the upcoming Review Conference. The ELBI contingent also met with members of the Implementation Support Unit and were briefed on how the ISU supports the Convention in nations around the world.

It is still early days with regard to ELBI's engagement with the BWC. Going forward, we hope to make it a regular and integral aspect to the Fellow's ELBI experience. We would like to continue to facilitate Fellows attendance at the Convention's proceedings, and potentially find ways for Fellows to provide technical support to delegations as needed. In addition, the fact that the program adds a new cohort every 12 months ensures a high level of awareness at the cutting edge of biomedical science, a fact which could potentially be leveraged by BWC stakeholders.

Before I move on, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I see at least four fellows here today, and while I won't embarrass you by calling you out by name, it's great to see you, as always.

Finally, at the risk of stating the obvious, I wanted to bring up a few ways that NGO's can interface with and support the BWC more generally. And - just to preface this - I would agree w/ the point raised earlier that resources are needed to enable these functions.

I think that the fact that CNS is co-hosting this event speaks volumes, as NGO's by and large have a convening function that has proved useful to BWC stakeholders in the past. In addition, NGO's with an interest in biological non-proliferation can provide original research, analysis, and commentary on issues relevant to the Convention.

As one example, at the MSP side event that I mentioned earlier, my colleagues presented preliminary findings from a Delphi study that we conducted with 58 biosecurity experts in the United States. I know a number of you were a part of that work, so thank you for your involvement. The study looked at how experts perceive the imminence and severity of biological threats. We found that despite decades of work in this field, consensus regarding the likelihood and types of threats we face is elusive, even among experts, which may complicate biological non-proliferation efforts. It would be interesting to see whether there is similar lack of consensus in other national delegations and expert communities.

Finally, in order to keep up with the increasingly rapid pace of technological advancement, NGO's can augment ongoing S&T horizon scanning efforts. These are just a few examples of how NGOs can support the BWC. Our Center looks forward to continued discussion and to offering our support to the Convention's unique and important role now, and in the future.

Thank you very much for your time and attention, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.