



## **Study Guide**

**Committee: The Disarmament and International Security  
Committee (DISEC)**

**The Control of Bioweapons In Today's World**

# **Letter from the Chairs:**

Honourable Delegates,

It is our distinct pleasure to welcome you to the Disarmament and International Security Committee at BDMUN 2021. Prepare yourselves for two days of heated yet fruitful debate, brain-numbing crises and a dynamic committee experience. You will have the opportunity to meet students of diverse backgrounds and grow as a delegate through being part of this challenging journey, both inside and outside of the committee.

The DISEC, although being a non-binding committee, deals with the most relevant topics related to security and non-proliferation in today's world. At BDMUN, delegates of the DISEC will have to think on their feet in order to tackle the crises thrown at them by the EB, and not only will they have to produce paperwork to change the course of committee, but they will also debate upon issues which are of utmost importance to global safety.

Bioterrorism has been a part of warfare since the medieval period, however with the advent of the 20th century, it has become far more covert and sophisticated, noted examples being Unit 731 in WWII, and the Soviet Bioweapons Program, which was the largest clandestine bioweapons program in the world. In the 21st century, the threat of bioterrorism has risen to a new high, especially with the anthrax letter cases in the USA, and the development of gene editing plays a role of a double edged sword in this scenario.

BDMUN strives to provide the most well-rounded educational and enjoyable experience to delegates. These two days will be packed with challenges such as innovative crises, and resounding moral implications on the delegates. In this committee, we look forward to discussing the control of bioweapons in today's world. We will do our best to help you understand parliamentary procedures and to ensure that the views of all delegates are respected and heard. Nevertheless, we expect each delegate to come to the conference with an understanding of their country's interests. Never hesitate to ask us any doubts you may have in the course of the conference. To sum it up, in the words of Stalin, 'A sincere diplomat is like dry water or wooden iron.' Thus, in a world where the honest man doesn't exist, it is up to you crafty delegates to change the course of global politics in the context of biowarfare, in accordance with the vested interests of your allotted countries.

Regards,

Ahan Uke and Siddhee Bokria

Chairs of DISEC

BDMUN 2021

# **Introduction to the Committee:**

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) is the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly<sup>1</sup>. It deals with disarmament, global challenges, and peace threats that impact the international community, while also attempting to find solutions to the challenges that the international security regime faces. The mandate of DISEC is highlighted as, “to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources”.

The First Committee “works in close cooperation with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament.” It is the only Main Committee of the General Assembly entitled to verbatim records coverage. It takes into account the general principles of cooperation in maintaining international peace and security as well as principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments; promotion of cooperation agreements and action for cooperation, including international security, under the Charter, or in relation to the powers and functions of any other UN organ.

The First Committee sessions are structured into three distinctive stages:

1. General debate
2. Thematic discussions
3. Action on drafts

DISEC voting procedure is as follows:

1. Each member of the DISEC shall have one vote.
2. Decisions on procedural matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of 2/3rd of the committee present.
3. The phrase "members present and voting" means members casting an affirmative or negative vote. Members who abstain from voting are considered as not voting.
4. The chair may permit the explanation of voting before or after it . Votings should not be interrupted unless there is a point of order.
5. If two or more proposals relate to the same question, the chair shall, unless it decides otherwise, vote on the proposals in the order in which they have been submitted. The committee may, after each vote on a proposal, decide whether to vote on the next proposal.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>

# **Introduction to the Topic:**

The use of biological weapons can cause immense destruction if ever used. Only 16 countries plus Taiwan have had or are currently suspected of having biological weapons programs: Canada, China, Cuba, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Libya, North Korea, Russia, South Africa, Syria, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In this committee we can discuss the control of Bioweapons in today's world. We have the P5 nations and smaller countries like Cuba and Libya.

Biological weapons are microorganisms like viruses, bacteria, fungi, or other toxins that are produced and released deliberately to cause disease and death in humans, animals or plants.<sup>2</sup>

They represent a subset of a broader class of weapons, which include chemical, nuclear and radioactive weapons, known as weapons of mass destruction.

The use of biological agents is a major concern, and there is an increased threat of the use of these agents in a bioterrorist attack.

Biological weapons and biological warfare represent a serious threat not just to nations and their citizens, but also to unaffected states and ecosystems. The destruction that biological agents might do endangers various ecosystems, businesses that rely on the environment, and, most importantly, can lead to a warring state where citizens are collateral.

The regulation and monitoring of access to materials and biological agents that may be used to build bioweapons has been discussed. However, many of these materials are common compounds utilised in helpful biological research, and such actions would severely hinder researchers if not carefully defined.

Because of rapid advancements in biotechnology, nearly any country with a pharmaceutical or medical industry today has the knowledge and equipment necessary to produce biological weapons. With the development of technology and knowledge, the risk of poor lab safety rises, with implications ranging from dangerous lab mishaps to the unintentional creation of "superbugs" that are beyond the control of public health systems.<sup>3</sup>

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons. It was the first

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.who.int/health-topics/biological-weapons#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/biological-weapons#tab=tab_1)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nti.org/learn/biological/>

multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>4</sup>

Terms of the Treaty:

The BWC bans:

- The development, stockpiling, acquisition, retention, and production of:
  1. Biological agents and toxins "of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes;"
  2. Weapons, equipment, and delivery vehicles "designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict."
- The transfer of or assistance with acquiring the agents, toxins, weapons, equipment, and delivery vehicles described above.

The convention further requires states-parties to destroy or divert to peaceful purposes the "agents, toxins, weapons, equipment, and means of delivery" described above within nine months of the convention's entry into force. The BWC does not ban the use of biological and toxin weapons but reaffirms the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibits such use. It also does not ban biodefense programs.

## **Key terms:**

**Biological Weapon:** a harmful biological agent (such as a pathogenic microorganism or a neurotoxin) used as a weapon to cause death or disease usually on a large scale<sup>5</sup>

**Epidemic:** An epidemic is the rapid spread of disease to a large number of people in a given population within a short period of time.

**Pandemic :** A pandemic is defined as “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people”.

**Geneva Protocol:** The Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, usually called the Geneva Protocol, is a treaty prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons in international armed conflicts.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/disarmament/biological-weapons/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/biological%20weapon>

Bioterrorism: Bioterrorism is the use of bacteria, viruses, or germs to purposely harm large quantities of people or communities. These “weapons” are spread through air, water, or food sources. Bioterrorism is rare and is used to threaten people, governments, and countries.<sup>6</sup>

Superbug: a pathogenic microorganism and especially a bacterium that has developed resistance to the medications normally used against it.

## **Background Information:**

A number of notable people from across the United States media organisations and prominent members of Congress received unmarked white envelopes with addresses scrawled over their backs in sloppy handwriting in early September 2001. However, when the recipients opened the letters, they found that they had been the victims of the largest bioterrorism assault on US territory in history. Each envelope contained many spores of *Bacillus anthracis*, more widely known as Anthrax, a highly infectious bacterial compound. The shock of the September 11th attacks added to the infections and fatalities that resulted. Consequently, in an increasingly evolved scientific society, this caused the world to take notice for the first time of the rising and devastating threat of biological weapons.<sup>7</sup>

Multiple governments embarked on very ambitious biological weapons projects in the decades preceding up to and during World War II. This includes Japan's extensive biological weapons research and development programme. Over 3000 scientists made up the heart of this initiative, which was known as "Unit 731." Over 10,000 inmates are believed to have died as a result of experimental diseases that caused gas gangrene, cholera, and dysentery, among other illnesses. Germany was once again suspected of using biological weapons, but no accusations were brought against them.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, several states, but particularly the United States, created a significant biological weapons development programme. During the Korean War, the US denied employing biological weapons for offensive reasons, despite scientists developing poisons and infections that could be used both defensively and offensively in research facilities across the country. Other countries had strong reasons to distrust the Geneva Protocol's legitimacy because the US had not yet ratified it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://familydoctor.org/bioterrorism/>

<sup>7</sup> “Amerithrax or Anthrax Investigation.” Page. Federal Bureau of Investigation. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Riedel, Stefan. “Biological Warfare and Bioterrorism: A Historical Review.” *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)* 17.4 (2004): 400–406. Print.

However, other countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union, secretly sought biological weapons as well, despite vehement denials from all of them. The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) was developed in 1972 and approved in 1975 in an attempt to halt the bleeding of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Signatories to the agreement are prohibited from creating delivery methods or exporting biological weapons technology to other countries, and existing technology or stocks must be destroyed.

## **Current Situation:**

The BWC, despite its greater efforts, has not completely halted the creation of biological weapons, since states continue to have covert programmes in place, and incidences of state-sponsored and non-state-sponsored use of biological weapons for terrorist purposes continue to occur.<sup>9</sup> Anthrax outbreaks have recently occurred in Tokyo in 1993 and the United States in 2001, both as a result of infamous letters sent to news media offices and the US Congress.<sup>10</sup> In reality, some countries have started research into the use of biological agents against materials or plants. The fact that the US has been doing such research under the cover of “defensive” purposes since 1998, research proposals have surfaced since 2002 that are likely to be used for offensive purposes.

Bioterrorism is on the rise in the current day, when typical routes are more easily blocked. Biological agents are relatively easy to procure and disseminate, and they may instil broad fear and terror in addition to causing physical harm. The issue of the employment of agents that do not hurt humans but disrupt the economy has been particularly important.<sup>11</sup> The foot-and-mouth disease virus, for example, is an important pathogen with the potential to be weaponized.

Although this virus has practically minimal ability to infect people, it has the potential to cause extensive economic harm and public worry, as demonstrated by the FMD outbreaks in the United Kingdom in 2001 and 2007.

As previously stated, the threat of an assault is particularly significant due to the uncertain situation in the Middle East. The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government during its continuing civil conflict in 2016 has raised concerns about the possibility of bioweapons in the same territory. Not only are there strong suspicions that bioweapons are being developed in the

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<sup>9</sup> Riedel, Stefan. “Biological Warfare and Bioterrorism: A Historical Review.” *Proceedings (Baylor University. Medical Center)* 17.4 (2004): 400–406. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Brachman PS (2002). Bioterrorism: an update with a focus on anthrax. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 155(11), 981-987.

<sup>11</sup> Advantages of Biologics as Weapons Bioterrorism: A Threat to National Security or Public Health Defining Issue? MM&I 554 University of Wisconsin–Madison and Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, September 30, 2008.

region, but the situation might potentially spiral out of control if warring factions begin to use such weapons openly.<sup>12</sup> If other global powers with secret biological weapons research programmes have significant interests in the region, the risk of global biological outbreaks increases dramatically. Despite the fact that the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has been more effective than the Geneva Protocol of 1925, it is becoming clear that even the BWC has fallen short of the task at hand.

A wide range of groups or individuals might use biological agents as instruments of terror. At the most dangerous end of the spectrum are large organizations that are well-funded and possibly state-supported. They would be expected to cause the greatest harm, because of their access to scientific expertise, biological agents, and most importantly, dissemination technology, including the capability to produce refined dry agents, deliverable in milled particles of the proper size for aerosol dissemination.

The Aum Shinrikyo in Japan is an example of a well- financed organization that was attempting to develop biological weapons capability. However, they were not successful in their multiple attempts to release anthrax and botulinum toxin. On this end of the spectrum, the list of biological agents available to cause mass casualties is small and would probably include one of the classic biological agents. The probability of occurrence is low, however, the consequences of a possible successful attack are serious.

## **CORONAVIRUS RELATIONS TO BIOLOGICAL WARFARE:**

The coronavirus pandemic has seen the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories regarding the intentional nature of the virus, allegedly manipulated in a laboratory similar to a biological weapon. Reliable scientific evidence has refuted such assertions. However, the fact remains that, whatever the origin of the pandemic, whether natural, accidental or deliberate, by state or non-state actors, societies need to be better prepared to prevent, mitigate or face the effects of epidemics and pandemics.

While most reports pointed to Wuhan's wet markets and its wild livestock as source of a zoonotic (animal-to-human) transmission, a parallel narrative of the virus having originated in or spilling out of a laboratory, intentionally or by accident, has again gained traction. With global opinion being mobilised against China to make it accountable for the pandemic, the resultant geopolitical firestorm does not appear to be a mere fleeting affair. Rather, the omnipotent imprint of the pandemic is likely to generate new interest in the exploitation of biological agents for political

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<sup>12</sup> Binder, M. K. 2011. Nations of Concern: Syria. Encyclopedia of Bioterrorism Defense. 1–4.

ends which, in turn, could necessitate greater normative impulses to mitigate the consequent dangers.

## **Questions A Resolution Must Answer:**

1. How can the UN adequately regulate and monitor biological research while promoting trust and reliability in reporting among the international community?
2. How can the UN prevent terrorist groups from obtaining access to materials to develop biological weapons?
3. Under what conditions, if any, should states be allowed to develop biological agents for defensive purposes or non-lethal uses?
4. How can the UN ensure that the BWC can keep pace with modern biotechnological advancements now and in the future?
5. How will states be incentivized to report accurately on their stockpiles of potential biological weapons, both defensive and offensive in nature?
6. How can the global community be prepared to respond in the event of a bioterrorism attack?
7. What are ways to make the mechanism under the two conventions more transparent and effective?

## **General tips while debating and research**

**Come Prepared:** Do not just come prepared with papers or speeches written down, but with your delegation's weaknesses, previous issues, economic weaknesses, and questionable actions about the case and prepare rebuttals for them. Anticipate attacks from other delegates, and come up with answers to refute them.

**The best defense is a good offense:** Start the criticism of opposing delegations with facts you have discovered weaken their stance. Demand that specific actions or statements of their country are explained.

**Agree, and then refute:** Start by agreeing with the other delegation, with what can be agreed with (and what won't hurt you) and then, refute it. It will make the power of your refute multiply.

**Find a "universal principal" everyone agrees on:** First, know your audience, then start your speech by stating a universal principle that everyone in the room will agree with. However, before you have started discussing your actual relevant points of debate, the entire audience will have for a moment, agreed with you.

**Capitalize on your strengths:** When in doubt, always remember your side's strengths, what good things you have, or did, or can do... And turn the focus on them.

Find common ground, and keep using it: When you find the debate is getting too overwhelming, and you need a certain delegation on your side, try to find something you both agree on, either from your foreign policy research or the other's speeches.

Admit fault: When necessary, when you are cornered, or when your side truly has made a mistake, admit the fault. Admitting fault in this little part in which you can no longer prove you were right, will actually strengthen your other arguments.

### Bibliography

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<https://bestdelegate.com/the-dos-and-donts-of-model-un-a-beginners-guide-to-achieving-success/>

This study guide and all material in it is only for reference purposes for delegates and affiliates of BDMUN 2021.

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