

STRENGTHENING BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY IN THE AMERICAS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EU-FUNDED OAS/CICTE PROJECT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1540 (2004)

The purpose of the three-year project “In support of strengthening biological safety and security in Latin American in line with the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery” (CFSP/2019/24/BIOSAFSEC LA OAS) is to improve biosafety and biosecurity in eight Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay) in accordance with UNSCR 1540 (2004). In particular, the project encourages the establishment and enforcement of effective measures to prevent the proliferation of biological weapons and their means of delivery through the delivery of technical assistance and cooperation in the Americas.



The aim of the ongoing project, implemented by the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism of the Organization of American States (‘OAS/CICTE’), is to further increase beneficiary states’ capacity to effectively anticipate and respond to large-scale incidents involving biological

agents, whether man-made or naturally occurring. The project also would serve to improve interagency and international cooperation among OAS Member States, and to address legislative gaps that currently exist in some of the target countries and complement efforts to implement the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). In order to achieve these ends, CICTE/OAS aimed at bringing together the responsible national authorities of the beneficiary countries, relevant representatives of the private sector and civil society, and qualified international experts, to explore steps that can be taken to ensure improved biosafety and biosecurity capabilities in those states and, more broadly, in the OAS region.

The Project employs a two-pronged approach that incorporates both national and sub-regional activities. It seeks to leverage the Secretariat’s prior experience working on these matters in the Americas, along with its well-established network of contacts and partners (especially in the public sector). At a national level, efforts focus on working with individual OAS Member States to enhance national capacities, draft legislation and regulations and develop country-specific action plans for strengthening operational capabilities. At the regional level, the capacity building activities are related to the promotion of the exchange of information and good practices.

An additional objective of the project has been to leverage a ‘peer review’ exercise which had been developed in recent years, under which States voluntarily agreed to work

together to assess their efforts to implement 1540 obligations and to identify effective practices and areas for continued bilateral cooperation. Following successful 1540 peer review exercises between Chile and Colombia (2017), the Dominican Republic and Panama (2019) —including a follow-up in 2022/2023— and Paraguay and Uruguay (2019), the intention was to provide specific assistance and cooperation activities for all those countries. All these activities are expected to promote and strengthen the continued cooperation among the countries, share experiences and promote the practice of publishing technical papers to capture the advances made in these forums.

It is well known that, in order to comply with the standards, set by the BWC and UNSCR 1540 (2004), countries should take efficient legislative and regulatory measures and establish appropriate controls over sensitive materials. Specifically, it is expected that this project will help towards harmonizing legal and regulatory frameworks on biosafety and biosecurity throughout the region, promote collaboration and cooperation, in particular through 1540 peer review exercises, and facilitate continuous training.

This project complements previous efforts carried out by OAS/CICTE since 2005 to increase biosafety and biosecurity awareness and capacity in the Americas. Back in 2010, the OAS/CICTE Secretariat was given a specific mandate to develop a program to assist in the implementation of UNSCR 1540 (2004). Consequently, a strategic partnership was formed between the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the 1540 Committee Group of Experts, and the OAS/CICTE Secretariat to implement a technical assistance and capacity building pilot project in the Americas to facilitate Member States' efforts to implement the different areas covered by UNSCR 1540 (2004).

OAS/CICTE's main objectives have been to work with countries whose governments are fully engaged in the physical protection and accounting of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear ('CBRN') materials as part of those states' non-proliferation efforts, as well as to seek to help the beneficiary states implement UNSCR 1540 (2004) by identifying specific needs and challenges in order to tailor legislative assistance and specialized capacity-building activities. The technical assistance offered by OAS/CICTE in this regard has consisted in drafting 1540 national action plans and strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks; building capacity to prevent and combat nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological material trafficking and smuggling; promoting the exchange of effective practices through the use of the peer review methodology; and facilitating coordination at the political level to identify areas for regional and sub-regional cooperation.



The 50 month-long project has been generously funded by the European Union (Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/2108 of 9 December 2019).