

CONCEPT NOTE

Closing the Gaps: A Systems-Based Approach to Sustainable Biological Threat Reduction

Global Health Security Conference, 8 June, 1pm - 6pm

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre (Room 305)

Summary

With many high-risk pathogens originating in animals or held in animal health laboratories, Veterinary Services are central to national and global security. This session showcases how the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) is working with its Members in Africa to implement whole-of-system approaches to biological threat reduction, offering practical lessons for cross-sectoral collaboration and resilience.

Background

Most pathogens that have been used in biological weapons development have been pathogens of animal origin (including zoonoses). These pathogens have wide-ranging potentially devastating impacts on animal and human health, livelihoods, national economies and food security. The risks of deliberate release by bad actors or the accidental release from laboratories are real. The downstream effects of disease outbreaks, whether they be natural, accidental or deliberate in origin further disrupt society and impact on national security. Veterinary Services, working alongside their partners in security and law enforcement sectors, therefore have a central role to play in risk mitigation and in protecting national security.

Effective and sustainable biological threat reduction requires a whole-of-system approach—one that strengthens every component of national preparedness, from policy and governance to frontline operational capacities.

Robust, accountable, and well-coordinated Veterinary Services play a central role in this system, serving as a critical bridge between the animal health sector, public health, security agencies, and emergency management structures. Through the **Fortifying Institutional Resilience Against Biological Threats (FIRABioT)** project, funded by Global Affairs Canada, WOAH has supported African countries in closing systemic gaps by enhancing governance frameworks, improving biosecurity and biosafety practices, enabling stronger cross-sectoral collaboration, and operationalising practical preparedness and response mechanisms.

This side event will highlight real-world experiences from African countries that have implemented sustainable biothreat reduction measures across their Veterinary Services and in partnership with law enforcement and security institutions. By showcasing approaches that integrate technical, organisational, and governance elements, the session will illustrate what a whole-of-system model looks like in practice. It will also explore how these insights can inform ongoing efforts in both Africa and the ASEAN region, supporting countries seeking to build resilient systems capable of preventing, detecting, and responding to biological threats in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

Objectives

- Showcase global and national case studies of Biological Threat Reduction activities implemented by Veterinary Services in Africa
- Highlight practical lessons identified, including enabling factors and challenges
- Facilitate exchange between African and ASEAN experts to inform future BTR programming
- Strengthen dialogue on the role of Veterinary Services in advancing global health security

Participants

The side event will bring together:

- National experts from Veterinary Services in Africa engaged in WOA's FIRABioT project
- Representatives of global and regional operational partners
- Experts from ASEAN Member States involved in, or planning, Biological Threat Reduction initiatives
- Conference participants interested in veterinary contributions to global health security

Programme

13:00 Networking lunch

14:00 Opening and introduction (WOAH Sub- Regional Representation for Eastern Africa Nairobi, WOA Headquarters, and Global Affairs Canada)

14:15 Implementing Biological Threat Reduction

National case studies – *world café format* (Algeria, Congo (Republic), Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe).

16:00 Short film ('The Fever') and Coffee break

16:30 Implementing Biological Threat Reduction

Regional case studies across Africa

17:00 Moderated discussion and cross-regional exchange

17:45 Closing remarks

18:00 Close