A United Nations training course to investigate allegations of use of chemical, biological and/or toxin weapons

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Abstract

In case of an alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin weapons, the United Nations Secretary-General may be requested by any Member State to deploy a fact-finding mission in order to ascertain the facts. Such a Mission would be manned by a roster of qualified experts which the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs manages. This drove France to organize a training course in June 2015, and to conduct the basic training of twenty junior experts. This paper reports on the UN approach to training, based on some e-learning prior to the course so as to obtain security certificates, a few theoretical conferences and, for most of the course, scenarios role-played by the trainees. It also depicts the key skills required to perform the fact-finding mission : the international legal framework, the technical guidelines to abide by, and the general methodology. The experts operate as a team ; they conduct interviews of victims and officials, visit sites looking for evidence of weapons use, take samples, do clinical examination, and collect documents, photographs or video footages. Everything is registered in order to preserve the chain of custody. They produce a scientific and factual report. The completion of this training course enabled some French Armed Forces physicians to become part of the few experts who could be deployed for a fact-finding mission.

Keywords : CBRN weapons. International fact-finding mission. Training course. United Nations.

Résumé

UNE FORMATION DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENQUÊTE EN CAS D'ALLÉGATION D'EMPLOI D'ARME CHIMIQUE, BIOLOGIQUE ET/OU TOXINE.

En cas d'allégation d'emploi d'arme chimique, biologique ou toxinique, le Secrétaire Général de l'Organisation des Nations unies peut être sollicité par n'importe quel État membre pour conduire une mission de terrain destinée à établir les faits. Cette mission serait armée à partir d'un vivier d'« experts qualifiés » tenu à jour par le Bureau des affaires de désarmement des Nations-Unies. Cela a conduit la France à organiser une formation en juin 2015 destinée à une vingtaine d'experts débutants. Cet article présente l'approche onusienne de la formation : des cours en ligne permettant l'obtention de certificats de sécurité, quelques conférences théoriques, et une majorité de jeux de rôle des stagiaires. Il relate aussi les enseignements clés pour conduire l'enquête : le cadre juridique international, les directives techniques à suivre, et la méthodologie générale. Les experts travaillent en équipe ; ils réalisent des entretiens des victimes et des officiels, conduisent des visites sur site pour rechercher les preuves de l'utilisation d'armes, prélèvent des échantillons, réalisent des examens cliniques, collectent des documents, des photos ou des vidéos. Tout est enregistré afin d'assurer la traçabilité des éléments de preuve. Ils rédigent un rapport scientifique objectif. Ce stage a permis de qualifier des médecins militaires français à faire partie du petit nombre d'experts qui pourraient réaliser une mission d'enquête.

Mots-clés : Armes NRBC. Mission internationale d'établissement des faits. Nations Unies. Stage de formation.

Introduction

As the recent events in the Middle East show, the use of chemical, biological or toxin (CBT) weapons is a credible threat during conflicts or terrorist attacks. The authors of these attacks do not always admit that they have used those kinds of weapons. Yet, doing so constitutes a violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol (1), of the Chemical Weapons Convention (2) or of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (3). The ability of the International Community to establish evidence of Biological Weapons (BW) or Chemical Weapons (CW) use has the potential to deter possible perpetrators. Triggered by a request of any Member State, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) is authorized to establish a field Mission under the so-called « UN SG Mechanism » and dispatch a fact-finding team to the site(s) of the alleged incident(s) (4) and promptly report to all UN Member States. Such a Mission would be manned by qualified experts from the Member States listed on a roster, which the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) manages. However, training these experts remains a prerogative of the Member States (5,6). While international cooperation is improving its

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preparation to address such allegations, a training course for experts nominated to the roster of the Secretary General's Mechanism (SGM) took place in France between June 7th and 19th, 2015. The Central Direction of the French Defence Health Service was requested by the Armed forces Staff to find qualified trainees, within the framework of its chemical biological radiological and nuclear (CBRN) mission. It was only the second time that France, namely the General Directorate for International Relations and Strategy of the French Ministry of Defence (DGRIS) organized this kind of training, in close cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). The first-ever training course was organised by the Government of Sweden in June 2009. In November 2012, the second training course took place in France, and in 2014, in Sweden ; the United Kingdom and Germany hosted training courses too. It was an unexpected medical Mission for a trainee, definitely not a very well-known Mechanism, involving skills in political analysis, diplomacy, security, investigation management, stress management and team working. After academic lectures, a practical training course took place in the field in Fontevraud-L'Abbaye (2 CBRN Dragoons Regiment) and Saumur (Joint CBRN Defense Center). In a first part, this paper depicts the UN training course. The second part analyzes the course: the teaching methods in keeping with the UN way of training and skills for the missions.

Before training: online preparation

The trainees received guidance by e-mail and on a specific internet UN site (7). They had to read the SGM Guidelines and Procedures and the updated appendices for an investigation in case of alleged use(s) of CBT weapons. Furthermore, prior to beginning the training, all the participants were expected to complete three online training classes about security organized by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) (8). These classes were: « Basic security in the field », « Advanced security in the field » and « Information Security Awareness Training » (Table 1). Each class

Table I. Online advance preparation of the United Nation department of safety and security.

Online training courses	Modules
Basic security in the field (staff safety, health, and welfare)	1. Introduction 2. The UN security management system 3. On the move 4. Where you live and work 5. Your health 6 Your wellbeing 7 Your personal safety
Advanced security in the field	1. Introduction 2. Knowing and using your vital security tools 3. Your public behaviour, image, and your personal safety 4. Assessing your security risks 5. Nothing is more important than your wellbeingw 6 Your options in challenging environments
Information Security Awareness Training	1. Introduction to information security 2. Protecting sensitive information 3. Social engineering 4. Password selection and usage 5. Electronic messaging and phishing 6 Accessing information on the internet 7. Responding to incidents 8. Cybercrime and target identification 9. Mobile devices and wireless networks 10. Data destruction 11. Encryption 12. Social networking and personal privacy 13. Protecting children online and security within the home 14. Security of your data in the cloud

comprised slides presented by a speaker, and short videos. The main part of teaching was based on readings and podcasts listening; it was followed by an assessment. Those who passed were issued a personal certificate whose validity was limited to three years. Taking these courses is mandatory for all personnel stationed in or travelling to a non-headquarters duty station/mission for the UN.

The training course

Participants

Fourteen nations were represented by the trainees: Australia, Burkina Faso, Canada, China, France, Italy, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The trainees were experts pointed out to UNODA by their countries (5). Most had a scientific or technological background (microbiologists, chemists, public health physicians, armed forces physicians), and there were a few military officers. France, Australia, and the United-Kingdom sent observers. The staff was composed of experimented officials. For example, the UNODA officer in charge of the course was a former Soviet diplomat with a chemical and biological weapons (CBW) disarmament experience and a vast field experience gained with the UN Inspections in Iraq. The scientific adviser of the course was a French Professor, the Head of the Department of Biology of Transmissible Agents of the French Armed Forces Biomedical Research Institute. The trainees were divided in two teams of ten people, only two days after the inception of the course. Each team was coached by a supervisor nicknamed « the mother ». Both mothers (an Englishman and a Canadian) had taken part in the investigation for allegations of use of chemical weapons in 2013 in Syria within the framework of the joint UN-OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) mission. The Canadian « mother » had served as the Head of Field Operations and Deputy Head of the Sellström Mission in Syria. The English « mother » was a former serviceman with twenty-five years of experience of Explosive and Ordnance Disposal (EOD); he was the head of the OPCW Mission that neutralized the Syrian chemical weapons production facilities, shortly after Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. All classes, be they conducted in Paris or in Fontevraud, were in English, without translation. Obviously, it meant for all the participants to be able to work in a multinational environment using English language on a daily basis.

Days 1-2

After an ice-breaker the evening before, the first two days were dedicated to academic presentations at the Cercle national des armées in Paris (Table 2).

Days 3-12

On the morning of the third day,, the trainees were divided into two teams, and the team leaders were appointed by the staff; in the afternoon, the participants moved to Fontevraud-L'Abbaye (Maine-et-Loire). The second part of the training course took place there. It consisting of nine days of an intensive training workshop (Table 3). The trainees had to learn how to conduct fact-finding activities working as a team, under the rigorous, but benevolent supervision of their « mothers ».

Table II. Schedule of the masterful presentations (the first two days).

«NEW YORK»				
	Sun	Mon 08/06/15		Tue 09/06/15
8:00		Registration course opening	8:00	Facts finding mission: Syria as a case study (Scott Cairns)
9:00		Opening statements ; Group picture (DGRIS)	9:00	Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
9:45		Coffee break	10:00	Coffee break
10:00		The SGM: Roles, principles, activation (((UNODA)	10:15	Introduction to biological weapons
11:00		World health organization (WHO) Briefing	11:00	World organization for animal health
11:30		Interpol Briefing	11:30	Buffet lunch
12:00		Scenario introduction	13:00	Mission establishment (UNODA)
12:30		Buffet lunch	14:00	Biological and Toxin Weapon Convention (BTWC)
13:15		Security and safety in the field (DSS)	15:00	Team building: key points
15:00		Cultural Awareness, theory and practice	16:00	Health and safety: before, during and after the mission
16:15		Coffee break	17:30	Daily wrap-up
16:30		Cultural Awareness, theory and practice		
18:15		Daily wrap-up		
20:00	Ice breaker			
22:00				

Table III. Schedule of the training course days 4-12 *Head quarter of the United Nations in New-York.

	«GENEVA»		«FLEE» (fictitious country , site of the alleged use of a biological weapon)						
2015	11/06	12/06	13/06	14/06	15/06	16	17/06	18	19/06/15
8:00	Achieving Mission objectives	Presentation : team's main site activities	Planning for site activities	Mission planning for field operations	Field exercise preparation by teams	FIELD DAY 1	Report preparation	FIELD DAY 2	Report
9:00	Teams preparation and planning	Class : site exploitation							Presentation of report by teams
10:00	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break						
11:00	Teams preparation and planning	Class : data collection and planning	Skill classes (sampling, safety,…) (ODA)						Discussion on the training course
12:00	Initial meeting with UN	Decision making for sampling							
12:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		Lunch		Course certificates
13:30	Tularemia	Introduction to interviews	Meeting with UN (Team A)	Mission planning for field operations	Meeting with EOD/ sampling teams and minders		Mission planning for new site activities		Lunch
14:30	Teams preparation and planning (teams)	Getting information through conversation : presentation	Meeting with UN (Team B)						Movement to Paris and the end of the training course.
16:15	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break		Coffee break				
16:30	Preparation of back brief to New-York (Teams)	Getting information through conversation : practice	Meeting with host nation debrief		Field exercise preparation by teams	Debrief			
17:30	Briefing to UNHQ* (Teams)	Wrap-up and debrief	Medical interview: presentation and exercise		Briefing to UNHQ* (Teams)				
18:00	Daily wrap-up	Daily wrap-up	Daily wrap-up	Daily wrap-up	Daily wrap-up		Daily wrap-up		
20:00	Reception dinner (RD)	Reception dinner	Reception dinner	Reception dinner	Reception dinner	RD	Reception dinner	RD	

The scenario

A detailed and credible scenario was distributed to the trainees on the first day of the course.

The documents below were made available to the trainees:

1. The letter by the Head of State of the (fictitious) Republic of Flée to the UN Secretary-General reporting the alleged use of a biological weapon (tularemia) against civilian targets by another fictitious country called Mopstuv. This letter provided the information pertaining to the alleged use, as requested by the UNSG Mechanism's guidelines- appendix I (5).

2. Background information on the two belligerent countries: political situation, geography, history,

population, armed forces and police forces, security situation, humanitarian situation, refugees, infrastructure and economy.

3. The Mandate given by the Secretary-General to the fact-finding mission, was based on General Assembly resolution 42/37C (4). The aim was to ascertain the facts related to an allegation of use of biological weapons, to gather relevant evidence and undertake analyses, and to deliver a report to the Secretary-General, following the UN Guidelines and Procedures (5) and its updated technical appendices of 2007 (9).

Meetings with the UN or a host nation

During the training course, the pace of activities, although it was inevitably compressed, endeavored to remain as realistic as possible. On the one hand, Video Tele Conferences (VTCs) were simulated with the Officwe of the UN Secretary-General in New York, and on the other hand meetings were organized with the host nation to exchange information. For example, the first meeting took place with the host nation. The purpose for the trainees was to explain to the host nation's ambassador their Mandate, as depicted in their terms of reference, and to request support that the host nation should provide to them during their Mission. After thorough preparation by the team, each meeting was role-played (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Team leader on the grill: an official meeting.

Scenario-based training

For the first Practical Exercise (PE), the fact-finding team had to move as part of a convoy, as if it were in a war-torn country (Flee), on its way to a sampling mission. The aim was to assess security, to practice the radio-checks with the base, to clear the check-points properly. For the second PE, the experts had to realize environmental sampling while filling out the corresponding forms with a view to preserving the chain of custody. Each PE was followed by a short de-brief, so as to identify what had been done well and what had to be improved. Several indoor PEs were organized in order to practice the interview method with eye witnesses, victims, patients or with authorities. The first field day took place in the field training area of the CBRN Regiment of Dragoons in Fontevraud. For half of the day, the fact-finding teams had to take samples and do interviews on the site of the alleged use (Figure 2), and during the other half of the day, they went to a hospital in order to interview victims, medical staff and authorities, and to collect documents. Sampling matrices and interviews were thoroughly prepared during team work the day before. The aim of the day was really to assess what had happened in Flée, the host nation, to ship samples to UN designated laboratories, to fill out the chain of custody forms, to find evidence, and to try to ascertain the facts of the alleged use of a biological weapon. Environmental sampling was performed by a « Sampling Identification Biological Chemical and Radiological Agent » (SIBCRA) team, soldiers of the French Air force from Cazaux, whom the team leader had to manage. Victims'blood samples were simulated by a local nurse, under the supervision of an expert in order to preserve the chain of custody.



Figure 2. Decontamination airlock for entry and exit in the contaminated field.

The second field day took place in the Joint CBRN Center in Saumur. Half the day was dedicated to a presentation of the Center, a visit of the decontamination facilities and the interview of a scientist suspected of having been involved in tularemia production. During the afternoon, the experts visited a Flée biological and chemical laboratory, had samples taken by the SIBCRA team and interviewed lab technicians. The final day of the course was dedicated to a presentation of the fact-finding team's initial report, and its first conclusions.

Lessons learnt

Pedagogical aspects: the UN approach to training

Advance preparation online

Online learning is a very interesting way of learning. It is interactive, always available, and provides an official certificate at the end of the course if the students get more than 80 % of the answers right at the final exam; this kind of training is very attractive. It could be useful in other contexts, for example for the soldiers to learn the health threats before deploying to a foreign country.

A scenario-based training

One of the best ways to learn is when the trainees are doing things. The principle of this training is to make the trainees really conduct the investigation step by step, with a program of increasing intensity, helped by the UN Guidelines and Procedures (9) and by an experimented supervisor. The concept of a « mother » who stays to a team, and coaches it, proved useful. The « mother » is benevolent with the trainees, accessible for all questions, and guides them so that they learn by themselves. The « mothers » followed the usual rules of a simulation training (10). The language of the training course was exclusively English. It was a good opportunity to practise for the trainees whose mother tongue was not English.

Skills for the mission: methodology to realize a UN investigation in case of an alleged use of CBT weapon

Before the Mission

To prepare the Mission, it is necessary to completely understand and to review the UN Secretary-General's Mandate specific to the mission, the up-to-date UN Guidelines and Procedures (9), the key documents of the legal framework. The Mandate and the Guidelines must be perfectly known by the inspectors.

Key documents (11)

• General Assembly (GA) resolution A/RES/42/37C (November 30th 1987) requests the Secretary-General to carry out investigations in response to reports that may be brought to his attention by any Member State concerning the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons; to provide the assistance of qualified experts, to develop further technical guidelines and procedures; and to compile and maintain lists of qualified experts provided by Member States.

• Security Council resolution 620 (August 26th1988) encourages the Secretary-General to promptly carry out investigations in response to allegations brought to his attention by any Member State concerning the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons; and, taking into account the investigations of the Secretary-General, decides to consider immediately appropriate and effective measures in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, should there be any future use of chemical weapons in violation of international law. This resolution puts the authority and weight of the Security Council behind UNGA resolution 42/37C, that is of lesser political value.

• General Assembly Document A/44/561 Annex I (October 4th1989) contains recommendations by the group of qualified experts convened pursuant to the General Assembly resolution A/RES/42/37C for guidelines and procedures for timely and efficient investigations of reports on the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons. It contains information (appendix I) to be provided by a Member State in the report which is to send to request the UN SG on possible alleged use of CBT weapon on its national territory. It also contains recommendations (annex I) for the Member States to provide qualified experts and analytical laboratories. There is a list of 12 areas of expertise for the experts updated with 16 areas in the technical guidelines and procedures in 2007 (appendix IV) (Table 4). Any Member State may designate laboratories whose names and capabilities should be places on a list maintained and periodically updated by the UN SG and whose services may be required to test for the presence of CBT agents. « They may be called upon by the UN SG to participate in inter-laboratory calibration studies so as to establish the validity and accuracy of their analytical methods ».

Table IV. CONOPS of the Mission.

CONOPS	
	SUPPORT ENABLERS
- AIM - TASKS - ASSUMPTIONS - COMMAND AND CONTROL - EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT - TIMEFRAME - SAFETY AND SECURITY	- PERSONNEL - LOGISTICS - TRANSPORT - COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) - MEDICAL, FIRST AID - MEDIA - FINANCE

• General Assembly resolution A/RES/45/57C (December 4th 990) endorses the proposal for guidelines and procedures for investigations of reports on the possible use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) or toxin weapons contained in document A/44/561.

• General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/288 (September 20th 2006) encourages the Secretary-General to update the roster of experts and laboratories, as well as the technical guidelines and procedures, available to him for the timely and efficient investigation of alleged use.

• Technical Guidelines and Procedures (TGP) developed by the group of qualified experts established in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 42/37C of November 30th 1987 (9). The TGP appendices were updated in 2007.

This Mission is also justified by the international legal framework resting on the Geneva Protocol of 1925 (1), the Chemical Weapons Convention (2) and the Biological Weapons Convention (3).

The country books (road to crisis, culture, geography, etc.) have to be studied. In the training

course scenario, the alleged CB agent is known, namely tularemia. A strong detailed updated documentation has to be collected about it (12). The concept of the operations (CONOPS) has to be determined (Table 5).

Table V. Action plan.

Activity	Purpose	Timing (and lead time)	Location	Personnel	Risk assessment	Equipment	Other

During the mission

The experts work effectively in teams. The three priorities are safety and security, facts finding, conclusion and report.

Working as a team

There are five key concepts for a successful international team: affinity, reciprocity, consensus, expertise (that gives authority) and reliability. « During the mission, your team is your life ; you have to trust each member ». « It's amazing how people do what you want them to do, if you just trust them ». The team leaders must manage the work of sub-teams to reach the objectives. It is very important to communicate within the team and to support one another. « Nobody has the level not to serve a coffee or hold the bag of someone else. You have to support each other ». Time discipline in the team must be respected. Experts always perform one part of the work of the teams, they have no overall view of the work of the teams, yet they have to strive to help their team leaders. The cohesion of the group is important. The more cohesion there is, the easier it will be to work together, and the better the results of the team will be.

Well being

The big mountain metaphor comes into play here. When there is a very complex mission to be performed, that needs a lot of work like this one, it can be depicted as a big mountain. The big mountain has to be broken into little rocks, and the rocks into stones, until you obtain achievable tasks. The training course may give rise to personal interrogations about one's own involvement. UN inspectors volunteer to realize this kind of mission. The framework of this mission is neutrality. Weapons are neither allowed in the UN vehicles, nor carried by UN personnel. Investigators have to accept to be a target sometimes, in a country at war, to fulfill the mission. This kind of mission may be useful for the world, for suffering people. It contributes to stop violations of the 1925 Geneva Protocol (1) and to stop wide-scale crimes.

Standards of Conduct

The experts have to conform with rules on how to behave when they serve for the UN. They are called « Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service » (13) which have to be known. They are based on the UN values which must guide international officials in all their actions: fundamental human rights, social justice, dignity and worth of human beings, gender equality and respect for nations great and small. The international civil servants must act with integrity, impartiality, independence, and discretion.

Security best practice

The red line notion applies: « Nothing is more important than your life »: during the mission, if it becomes necessary to choose between evidence and the life of the team, « you'll have to choose life ». During their mission in Syria, the supervisors had to cancel a visit because it was too dangerous. The acceptable level of risk needs to be clearly defined. During the entire mission, investigators have to implement the Mandate, do scientific proofs, while displaying integrity and impartiality in evidence management (Figure 3).

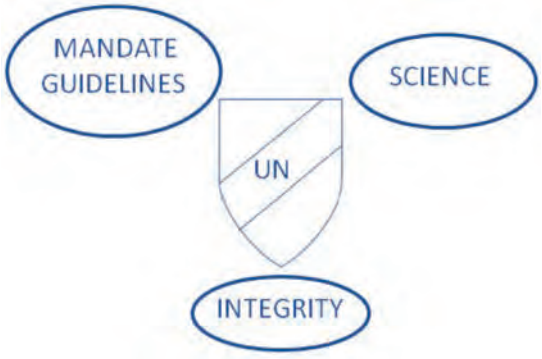


Figure 3. UN investigators shield.

Fact-finding best practice

The team has to find evidence to ascertain allegations. Samplings (environmental or biomedical) are convincing evidence for the UN. Primary analysis may be done by the UN experts in the host country, if they have the on-site capacity. Samplings are sent to a specialized laboratory designated by the UN, outside the country of the alleged use of CB weapon, provided and declared by the Member States on the UNODA roster. The samples are registered on specific UN forms, which must be filled out to preserve the chain of custody. The other types of evidence are interviews of victims or authorities (local or national authorities, medical staff), documents, observations, and admission of liability by a nation (Ex: Iraqi recognition of a biological weapon program or Syria admitting it possesses chemical weapons). An armed force physician can be useful for this kind of investigation: especially for his adaptability, for the victims or medical staff interviews, or for the medical support of the team members. As far as documents are concerned, primary evidence may not be used by the experts to work on, because they may be degraded. It is necessary to make copies to work on them. Every piece of evidence has to be recorded, for the sake of the chain of custody. Photographs and video footages are essential. A continuous assessment of evidence is necessary: is it really strong ? Is it admissible ? Does it prove anything ? For each visit on the sites of alleged use of CBT weapon, an evidence collection plan must be prepared (Table 6).

Table VI. Investigation matrix.

	FACTS AND ARGUMENTS		
SAMPLES			
INTERVIEWS			
	DELIBERATE	ACCIDENTAL	NATURAL

The conclusions and the report

During the mission, in order to gain different means or to communicate, several meetings have to be attended to by the team of experts with UN or host nations. A useful tool to prepare a meeting was proposed by supervisors who had already done this kind of missions in real life. It consists of three questions: « what do we want ? », « what do they want ? », and « what if ? ». Completing the investigation matrix is a real help to use the facts found on the field to obtain the objective conclusions of the report.

The aim of the investigation is to ascertain, in an objective and scientific manner, facts of alleged violations of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The investigation report has to be consistent with the Mandate given by the Secretary-General, and to reflect scientific observations in terms that the politicians will understand without any ambiguity. Anything the experts say or write may have significant political consequences. In case of an actual violation, the case might be brought to the Security Council. Politicians need a clear answer in the report about the allegation of use of CBT weapons. The report needs to be factual, unbiased, transparent, and scientifically sound. It must be given to the UN Secretary-General in person (5), even if it is very likely that the host nation will try to acquire it first.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to share an unusual experience of training by the UN, and the key lessons learnt. The UN training course which took place in France in June, 2015 was mainly based on situation scenarios, team work and the implementation of the lessons learnt. This training course contributed to give the experts, who might be requested, a common basis of understanding to complete facts-finding missions in the sites of alleged use of chemical biological or toxin weapons, and tools to produce a scientific and objective report within a given format.

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