

BEST PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT: PRE-INFORMING AND PRE-BUNKING

CASE STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL COUNTER-DISINFORMATION PRACTICE IN PREPARATION OF CTBTO INTEGRATED FIELD EXERCISE 2026



Brief | October 2026

Public communication on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) On-Site Inspection (OSI) Integrated Field Exercise 2026 (IFE26) demonstrates how **pre-informing** and **pre-bunking** can mitigate chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) misinformation and disinformation.*

IFE26 replicates an actual OSI, deploying international surrogate inspectors, protective equipment and specialised instruments. Given limited public familiarity with nuclear verification, these elements may be interpreted as indications that Namibia is under formal investigation or that a nuclear incident has occurred. Such narratives could generate public concern, undermine trust in the exercise and its organisers, and distract from IFE26's purpose of strengthening nuclear-test verification. The CTBTO and Namibian authorities therefore proactively informed the public about the exercise and clarified its technical and institutional nature.

Open-source research conducted through September 2026 identified no evidence of a coordinated or sustained misinformation or disinformation campaign targeting IFE26.† The absence of a prominent false narrative may illustrate the value of pre-informing and pre-bunking, offering an example for other organisations planning CBRN-related activities.

DEFINITION OF PRE-INFORMING AND PRE-BUNKING^{1,2}

Pre-informing is the practice of providing clear information about an event which may or may not happen as soon as there are warning signs. By providing easily digestible factsheets explaining key terms, facts and skills in interpreting scientific literature, the public can more easily engage with official and scientific literature, enabling people to identify potential disinformation and misinformation.

Pre-bunking refers to the act of addressing or refuting potential false or misleading rumors before an individual is exposed. This involves educating people about common tactics of deception or manipulation, encouraging critical thinking, and engaging target audiences.

BACKGROUND TO IFE26^{3, 4, 5, 6}



IFEs are complex CTBTO exercises that test nearly all OSI elements, in an integrated manner, including field operations, inspection techniques, data management and logistics. Previous IFEs were held in Kazakhstan (2008) and Jordan (2014).



10 October –
20 November 2026



Namibia's Erongo Region, with
Swakopmund and Walvis Bay serving
logistical and operational roles



Around 250 experts
and about 150 tonnes
of equipment



To assess how the CTBTO would conduct an OSI if a suspected nuclear test explosion had to be investigated under the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)

WHAT IS BEING COMMUNICATED THROUGH PRE-INFORMING AND PRE-BUNKING?

PRE-INFORMING	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
	Explains the basic facts before the exercise begins	What IFE26 is, where it is, when it happens, who will participate ^{4,7}
	Explains why the exercise is important	Officials from the CTBTO clarify that IFE26 tests CTBTO's ability to investigate a suspected nuclear test explosion and improve OSI readiness, for when the Treaty enters into force, as well as to reduce the risk of misinterpretation regarding the purpose of this exercise ^{4,7}
	Explains why Namibia was selected	Namibia's CTBT commitment, International Monitoring System (IMS) facilities, Erongo geology, infrastructure and national interest, such as reputation and revenue ^{8, 9, 10}
	Prepares residents for unusual sights	Foreign equipment, white protective clothing, tents, fieldwork and security convoys ¹¹

* CBRN disinformation is the deliberate creation and spread of false or misleading information about CBRN materials, technologies, capabilities or activities, including both peaceful and military applications. Definitively identifying disinformation can be challenging, as intent and attribution are often unclear. For brevity, this note adopts a broad definition of "disinformation" that includes other information operations, such as misinformation, as they mislead the audience and shape perception and behaviour.

† Research was primarily conducted in English, German, Afrikaans and Oshikwanyama/Oshindonga, with targeted searches in Otjiherero, Khoekhoegowab, Rukwangali and Silozi.

PRE-BUNKING	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
	Anticipates likely false interpretations	Clarifies that IFE26 involves no nuclear materials, no explosions, no radiation, no hazardous materials, no harm to people or the environment ^{9,12}
	Prevents misunderstanding of sovereignty or inspection status	Namibia is hosting the exercise, not being inspected ¹¹

HOW ARE PRE-INFORMING AND PRE-BUNKING BEING DISSEMINATED?

	DISSEMINATION CHANNEL	ACTIVITY	FUNCTION
CTBTO	Social media	Official CTBTO and Secretary General Dr. Floyd's account have shared posts and videos showing IFE26 preparations ^{4,6}	Builds baseline understanding of what IFE26 is and why it is being conducted
	Local media engagement	Practical workshop with Namibian journalists ahead of the exercise ¹¹	Helps media report IFE26 accurately and avoid mistaken framing
	Official conference	CTBTO staff delivered a presentation on IFE26 and OSI capabilities at the CTBT: Science and Technology Conference 2025 ¹³	Provides technical information for the expert audience
NAMIBIAN GOVERNMENT/ MINISTRY OF MINES AND ENERGY (MME)	Social media	Reposts CTBTO material and shares national updates on IFE26 preparations ^{7,12}	Localises CTBTO messaging and reinforces ministry official explanations for Namibian audiences
	Offline outreach	Public information sessions with local communities in areas involved in the exercise ¹⁴	Brings information directly to affected communities and pre-empts concerns about radiation, explosions, nuclear materials, and environmental harm
MAINSTREAM/ LOCAL MEDIA	Print and online reporting	Afrikaans, English and German language coverage explaining IFE26 ^{3, 11, 15}	Translates official information into public-facing news coverage

LOCAL SENSITIVITY TO NUCLEAR- AND RADIATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES^{16, 17}

A 2024 local precedent may explain the early investment in pre-informing and pre-bunking around IFE26. In 2024, a private Namibian company planned a radioactive source storage and handling facility for offshore oil exploration equipment in Swakopmund. Residents raised health and environmental concerns. Misinformation claimed that a hazardous radioactive facility already operated in the area, prompting the government to publicly debunk these claims.

This case suggests local sensitivity to narratives involving radioactive or nuclear-related activity, and a corresponding vulnerability to misinformation. If similar narratives take hold around IFE26, public concern could harden into resistance, making the exercise harder to roll out smoothly and weakening trust in both local authorities and the CTBTO. The IFE26 pre-informing and pre-bunking efforts likely sought to pre-empt a similar dynamic.

CONCLUSION

IFE26 was announced well in advance, with repeated informational messaging since. Publicly available information does not indicate significant local opposition. Given the exercise's technical complexity and the local precedent, pre-informing and pre-bunking have likely been

critical in preventing opposition and any false narratives from forming. These efforts do not guarantee that disinformation will not emerge, but they narrow the information gaps in which misleading narratives take hold and strengthen public resilience if any narratives emerge.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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RN DISINFORMATION
IN DIPLOMATIC
COMMUNICATIONS



EXAMPLE TACTICS
AND NARRATIVES



BEST PRACTICES
FOR COUNTERING
RN DISINFO



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