

Wednesday 16th December 2015

Second day: the Review Conference and cooperation and assistance

The second day of the 2015 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) was devoted to preparations for the Eighth BWC Review Conference and to the standing agenda item on 'Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X'.

The day began with some final opening statements carried over from Monday and the opportunity for the NGOs to address an informal plenary. Statements were given by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN Security Council 1540 Committee, the G7 Global Partnership (given by Germany as the current chair of the G7), Sudan and Chile. NGO statements were given by: University of Bradford; Federation of American Scientists; UPMC Center for Health Security; VERTIC; International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA) and Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; University of London; University of Pittsburgh (Graduate School of Public Health); Research Group for Biological Arms Control, Hamburg University; Biosecure Ltd; Pax Christi International; Biosecurity Working Group of the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues; Center for Nonproliferation Studies; Parliamentarians for Global Action; Global Emerging Pathogens Treatment Consortium (GET); and Green Cross International. As usual, where copies of statements are provided by those that gave them, these will be added to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

The scheduled informal consultations scheduled for the evening did not take place owing to a desire by the NAM states parties to examine further, as a group, the 8 December Chair's non-paper on draft elements for the Final Report.

Review Conference arrangements

Three decisions have to be taken by the MSP in relation to the Eighth Review Conference – the President, the dates and the costs. It is the turn of the Eastern European Group to nominate the President and the group's candidate was MSP Vice-chair Ambassador György Molnár of Hungary. His appointment was made by acclamation by the meeting.

The depositaries of the BWC (Russia, UK, USA) proposed that there be two separate weeks of Preparatory Committee meetings and three weeks of Review Conference. The suggested dates were 18-22 April and 8-12 August for the PrepCom and 7-25 November for the Review Conference. This would total 25 days of activity, but the proposed cost would be not much greater than costs for the scheduled 17 days of activity in 2011. The ISU explained that this was due to a change in the costs of printing services via the UN which had reduced the costs of conference support. There was no consensus around this proposal, with concerns raised regarding costs for both the conference itself and for travel costs for participants to attend. A number of countries offered potential sponsorship to defray some travel costs. Ambassador Molnár was asked to consult with delegations to see if a consensus outcome could be achieved.

Cooperation and Assistance

The afternoon was devoted to cooperation and assistance issues. Statements were given by: Iran (for the non-aligned), Thailand, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Russia, UK, Germany, Canada, Japan, Iraq, Ecuador, Argentina, China, Mali, France, Germany (for Germany and Morocco), Australia, USA, India, Germany (as G7 Global Partnership chair) and Cuba.

A number of statements referred to MSP papers (either already published or forthcoming) reporting their activities in relation to Article X. The non-aligned repeated its call for 'clear, specific and timely' reports, as agreed at the Seventh Review Conference. The USA suggested all states parties should submit reports to the Eighth Review Conference. A Working Paper by the G7 Global Partnership highlighted Article X relevant activities with a number of partners.

Many statements spoke to specific projects or cooperative activities that strengthen healthcare systems in states that have fewer resources to call upon. This can be carried out through direct provision of equipment, but is enhanced through training and education which can lead to more sustainable improved abilities for detection of diseases, for example. The Article X database established after the Seventh Review Conference still appears to be underused. Asserting that implementation of Article X needs to be 'full and effective', the NAM reiterated their call for a new mechanism for its implementation.

References were made to sponsorship to support attendance at this MSP for representatives of Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cuba, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Jordan, Liberia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda and Ukraine with funding provided by Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA, either through the ISU or on a bilateral basis.

Export controls are a highly contested activity. They arise under this agenda item in one way as there are regular claims from the non-aligned that denials hinder the 'full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation' of the BWC. They also arise as an area for capacity building to ensure that states are not unwittingly used as a supply conduit for materials and technologies being misused. The Australia Group is a collaborative arrangement by some states to coordinate their export control policies in the biological and chemical spheres which has posted, via Australia, an offer on the database to help with capacity building in this area. There will always be potential for tension between a near-universal disarmament treaty and a far-from-universal collaborative arrangement where their issue areas overlap. China spoke to its Working Paper which seeks to establish a new, more universal, multilateral export control regime to overcome a 'serious imbalance' between international non-proliferation efforts and 'bio-technology international cooperation'. The India-USA Working Paper has a focus on capacity building in this area.

Side events and exhibitions

There were four side events on Tuesday. Two were convened at breakfast: one by the Hamburg Research Group and the Harvard Sussex Program entitled 'Let's talk about compliance: measures, methods, and modalities'; the other by Bradford University on 'Steps Toward Effective Biological Security Education'. Two side events were held at lunchtime: one by Canada on 'National implementation of the BWC: development of a culture of compliance among scientists'; the other by UNIDIR and France on '1925–2015: The Geneva Protocol at 90'. In the evening, there was the opening of an exhibition by Latvia, Poland and Russia on chemical weapons use on the Eastern Front in World War I. There is a second exhibition at the MSP, prepared by China, on Japanese biological weapons activities in China before and during World War II.

This is the third report from the BWC Meeting of States Parties, being held from 14 to 18 December 2015 in Geneva. These reports have been produced for all official BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) and are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>> and via <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie. He can be contacted during the Meeting of States Parties on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.