

Thursday 7th December 2017

The BWC Financial Situation and the Start of Private Meetings

The 2017 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Wednesday with the consideration of financial matters and with the first meetings behind closed doors in efforts to find a consensus on an inter-sessional work programme. During the morning, the Chair of the Meeting, Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill of India, circulated new papers. At the end of the day a short plenary was held to report on the private meetings. During the day, the NAM working paper on inter-sessional process proposals was made available as an official document bearing the identifier WP.21.

Financial matters

The first formal event of the day was a briefing to the Meeting by the UN Financial Resource Management Service about the current financial situation and future arrangements. The financial year for the UN is the calendar year, and for the current accounting period there is a shortfall of roughly US\$150,000 on assessed contributions since 2001. However, there has been some US\$623,000 in overpayments and advance payments which has meant there have been sufficient funds to carry out BWC activities and fund the ISU during 2017. Some elements of the financial situation have improved since the briefing to the Eighth Review Conference, with the collection rate for assessed contributions rising from 75 per cent to 94 per cent and a substantial reduction in arrears owed. One issue is that new UN accounting rules mean that contracts for personnel and for services cannot be signed until the UN has received sufficient funds to cover the costs. As invoices do not go out to States Parties until close to the start of the year, funds take time to arrive.

In the follow-on discussion, one suggestion made to get around the timing problem was to establish a 'working capital fund' that could be used to even out the cashflow. Comparisons were made with the financial arrangements for the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Just like the BWC, the CCW is a treaty that is outside of the formal structure of the United Nations, but which uses UN facilities and administrative support – the costs of which are reimbursed by the States Parties to the conventions. In neither case was any language regarding detailed financial matters included in the convention texts. Financial matters were considered at a CCW annual meeting just a few weeks ago, the report of which is available in an advance version via the CCW website <<http://www.unog.ch/ccw>>. This report will be numbered CCW/MSP/2017/8 and be accessible via the UN documents server <<http://documents.un.org>>. Differences between the conventions include how the relevant Implementation Support Units (ISUs) are funded. In the CCW case, financial difficulties have led to non-renewal of ISU staff contracts and the rearrangement of meetings. Other comparisons were made with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Atomic Energy

Agency (IAEA). There was a suggestion that an information paper be prepared outlining comparisons between financial arrangements for the BWC and other relevant bodies.

Inter-sessional programme discussions

The first private meeting of the MSP started in the morning in a side room (Salle XXI) a short time after the adjournment of the plenary. Ambassador Gill was explicit in his understanding that a private meeting was for delegates of States Parties only, thus no NGOs or observers such as the European Union would be able to participate.

The Chair circulated two documents within the room. One was a single page starting to draw together a structure for an inter-sessional work programme. The other was a compilation of various proposals that would form an annex that would indicate possible topics to be discussed within such a programme with text drawn from the Cuba paper (WP.8), the Russia-UK-USA paper (WP.10), the NAM paper (WP.21) and the President's Proposal from the Eighth Review Conference (BWC/CONF.VIII/CRP.3). Past practice shows that such documents are used to draw together a consensus but will not reach such a consensus instantly – any such document that might be immediately accepted (or, indeed, be immediately rejected) by any delegations would be one that was unlikely to be in the necessary middle ground. From discussions with delegates who had been in the room, the papers were proving to be a useful tool to focus interactions.

At the end of the day, a formal plenary was convened to brief those who were not in the smaller room. Ambassador Gill described the sessions as 'very useful' and that discussions had been held on the structure that an inter-sessional programme might have, the content it might have, and how it might report its activities to the Ninth Review Conference. On possible topics, he indicated that the subjects of international cooperation and of science & technology review had been discussed in detail. He thanked States Parties for their 'constructive spirit'.

Before the meeting was adjourned, Russia took the floor. Mikhail Ulyanov, Director of the Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Department of the Foreign Ministry, noted there were only two days remaining and that if the MSP could not reach consensus there would be 'no tangible work done' to strengthen the BWC regime in the coming three years. He suggested that willingness to seek compromise was especially crucial at this time, otherwise in 48 hours delegates would leave 'with a sense we have failed in our duty to agree', concluding 'I would very much like to avoid that'.

Side Events

There were two breakfast events on Wednesday: one on 'Multilateral Biosecurity Dialogue in South-East Asia' convened by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security; and the other on 'What is the Role of the BWC Within the Global Health Security Landscape: The Global Health Security Agenda Joint External Evaluations, UNSCR 1540, and Sustainable Development Goals?' convened by Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security.

There were also two events at lunchtime: one on 'Global Catastrophic Biological Risk: Considering Very Low Probability, Very High Consequence Events' convened by Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford and the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, University of Cambridge; and the other on 'Initiating a Request under Article VII of the BTWC' convened by France and Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique.

After completion of the day's formal proceedings a reception was hosted by Ambassador Gill.

This is the fourth report from the BWC MSP, being held from 4 to 8 December 2017 in Geneva. These reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available via <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>> and <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> [please note there have been technical difficulties updating the BWPP website]. An email subscription link is available on each page. The author can be contacted via <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.