

Monday 16th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: setting the scene

The opening of the 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) marks the first of four years of meetings in the third inter-sessional process for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). The MX will be followed by a one-week Meeting of States Parties (MSP) in December. The third inter-sessional process was agreed at the Seventh BWC Review Conference that was held in December 2011. The Conference decided that this set of annual meetings would discuss three on-going topics as well as specific topics in particular years.

The 2012 meetings will be chaired by Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria. In an addition to earlier practice there will also be two Vice-Chairs – Ambassador Alexandre Fasel of Switzerland and Dr Cezary Lusinski of Poland. The 2011 Review Conference had nominated Ambassador Delmi's predecessor, Ambassador Idriss Jazaïry, to be the Chair but a rotation of personnel in the Algerian representation in Geneva led to the change.

A feature of the meetings in the inter-sessional processes is that they are much less formal than many other inter-governmental meetings, including BWC Review Conferences, which often end up much more focused on legalistic issues. By way of contrast, the inter-sessional process meetings are much more practical and focused on promoting ideas and learning from experiences in order to develop common understandings.

Topics under discussion during the 2012 meetings

The three on-going topics, also known as the standing agenda items, of the third inter-sessional process are 'Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X', 'Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention', and 'Strengthening national implementation'. In 2012 (and 2013) the meetings will also discuss 'How to enable fuller participation in the CBMs'. In a letter dated 21 June, the Chair proposed a breakdown of sub-topics under each of the topics that might be focused on in each year.

Article X covers the issue of access to the life sciences for peaceful purposes of the Convention and is seen as part of a bargain in which the renunciation of biological weapons and the control of the hostile uses of the life sciences have to be implemented in such a way as not to hinder the use of the life sciences for peaceful purposes. There remains a divergence of opinion between States Parties relating to Article X. Cooperation and assistance goes further than Article X and includes other aspects such as capacity building.

The changing science and technology context, and in particular the rapid advances in the life sciences, leads to changes in the nature of risks and threats the regime may need to counter, as well as providing new opportunities for peaceful uses.

Improved national implementation of the provisions of the BWC in ways that are appropriate to national contexts has long been seen as an important way of enhancing effectiveness of the overall regime to control biological weapons.

The system of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) under the Convention provides for returns to be provided by States Parties on certain relevant activities and facilities. While numbers of returns have been rising, there has been wide recognition that participation in CBMs could be improved further.

Preparations for the MX

Three background papers by the BWC's Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and two Working Papers by the United Kingdom had been issued as formal MX documents before the opening of the meeting. A further background paper and two documents submitted by the United States relating to Article X activities had been issued as 'advance versions' prior to being typeset as official documents. The advance release of papers allows for their contents to be considered before start of the MX. All these papers can be found via the BWC ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>; official documents can also be found via the UN documents server <<http://documents.un.org>> (reference numbers for the official documents for this meeting all start BWC/MSP/2012/MX/). Additional papers are likely to be issued.

Meetings of Experts – a developing format

The annual BWC meetings have developed in format and style since the first inter-sessional process started in 2003. Unlike earlier Meetings of Experts, this MX will not include much time for a general exchange of views, although there will be one session for introductory statements that cover more than one of the agenda items. There will also be a poster session following the end of conference room proceedings on Tuesday. As with earlier meetings, there will be a number of side events. While the side events have traditionally been held by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there has been a trend for other bodies, for example governments and inter-governmental organizations, to make use of these opportunities as well. A feature being repeated from earlier inter-sessional meetings is the use of 'Guests of the Meeting' – experts invited to share their expertise.

As the MXs in this third inter-sessional process will cover more topics than the equivalent earlier meetings had done, it is possible that the way these multiple topics are handled will further develop in the coming years.

There may be a further external influence on this MX as there is considerable attention on the negotiating conference for an Arms Trade Treaty being convened during most of July in New York. Key disarmament specialists from many countries are based in Geneva and some have been assigned to those negotiations. This means that many individuals familiar with BWC processes will not be in Geneva during this MX.

About these reports

Starting from the Sixth Review Conference in 2006, the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) has produced daily reports from each of the BWC meetings. The reports were initially designed to help people who were not in Geneva to follow the proceedings but are now also widely circulated each morning amongst delegates. Six reports will be produced during this MX, starting with this setting the scene report. A report will be produced covering each day's activities, the last of which will be circulated electronically after the MX has concluded.

The BWPP daily reports from the 2006 and 2011 Review Conferences, as well as those from the annual meetings in between, are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

This is the first report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) who can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts relating to these reports on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org>.

Tuesday 17th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: the opening day

The 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria in the chair.

Opening activities and statements

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Delmi noted that the Seventh Review Conference, from which the MX gets its authority, had 'managed to arrive at a good compromise' in putting together the topics to be discussed. The Ambassador also noted that sponsorship had been provided by Australia and Germany via the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to assist representatives from Colombia, Ghana and Namibia to attend the Meeting.

Formal decisions included admitting Israel and Namibia as observer states; the European Union, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Interpol, the League of Arab States, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health/OIE as international bodies; and three UN agencies: UNODA, UNIDIR, and UNICRI as UN bodies.

While the MX did not include an allocation of time for general debate, some States Parties took the opportunity to use the opening session to make introductory remarks. These were given in the following order: Cuba (for the non-aligned), Argentina, Morocco, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, India, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Iran, Guatemala, Pakistan, Turkey and Ghana. There was a considerable focus on assistance and cooperation issues as might be expected since most of these countries have previously made clear statements calling for emphasis on implementation of Article X.

Some themes appeared in a number of statements. The selection of topics for the annual meetings was referred to as being 'balanced'. There was a welcome for the Article X database agreed upon at the Seventh Review Conference and hopes expressed that it would assist provision of cooperation and assistance. There were calls for a mechanism beyond the database for Article X implementation and for verification arrangements for the Convention. The rapid developments in the life sciences were noted, and that these developments have both positive and negative aspects. Some countries provided examples of developments in national implementation, with Morocco highlighting that it had now put together a draft law on the handling of biological agents and Malaysia noting that a draft law it had prepared had been the subject of discussion in a meeting attended by a wide range of stakeholders. Guatemala noted it was active in the Central American Integration System efforts on Security Council resolution 1540 which included a significant national implementation element. On CBMs, there was a widespread recognition that more could be done and that they were not a substitute for verification. Pakistan noted it had provided a CBM return this year after much inter-agency work.

After these statements, six non-governmental organizations (NGOs) addressed the Meeting: the University of Bradford; International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Pax Christi International; the University of London; the Defence Medical College of Japan and the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; and the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues. These statements will be posted on the BWC ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Cooperation and assistance

The working session in the afternoon was on ‘Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X’. Statements were given in the following order: Cuba (for the non-aligned), Iran, Ukraine, European Union, UK, Cuba (in its national capacity), France, Australia, USA, Philippines, Russia, Switzerland, India, Chile, China, Mexico and Ghana. Iran and the USA took the floor again to follow up on points made in other statements.

Many countries spoke of their activities in support of international assistance, their experiences of receiving assistance or appeals for further assistance. A number of references were made to benefits that might result from cooperative activities with other bodies that have overlapping remits such as the WHO while at least one State Party, Iran, was concerned that mandates should remain distinct.

Iran stated that ‘discriminatory trade rules’ on materials and technologies relevant to the life sciences were a ‘violation’ of Article X. Ukraine highlighted a need for some form of scientific advisory body for the BWC. The EU noted that new Council Decisions were expected to follow up on the existing Joint Actions in support of the BWC and WHO. The UK denied its trade rules were discriminatory. The Philippines highlighted the new workplan on WMD issues agreed by the ASEAN Regional Forum earlier in July. India noted that it had both provided assistance to other countries and benefited from assistance given by others.

The working session ended with an introduction by Richard Lennane of the ISU on the Article X database. He noted that details of offers of assistance, starting with those provided by the United States, were now being entered into the database. He also noted that requests for assistance, which do not have to be tied to specific offers, were also invited to be placed in the database.

Documents of the Meeting

Four Working Papers by the USA were published as BWC/MSP/2012/MX/WP.3 through WP.6. The US Article X activities report became document INF.5. A Working Paper by China was made available in advance copy, as were two information papers from the EU.

Side events

Two side events were scheduled for Monday. The first, at lunchtime, was convened by the Inter-Academy Panel (the global network of sciences academies) on the subject of ‘Recent Developments in Science and Technology’. The event was opened, and chaired, by Andrzej Gorski (Polish Academy of Sciences). Presentations were given by Andrew Pitt (Aston University), Richard A Johnson (Global Helix LLC) and Ralf Trapp (consultant).

The second event was to be ‘speed networking’ after the formal proceedings had finished – an activity held during earlier MXs, but which did not take place as few delegates turned up to join in. In 2010, for example, participants were rotated around the room to meet a different person after each minute and a half – a method that proved highly successful at helping delegates get to know each other in an informal setting.

This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Wednesday 18th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: the second day

The 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Tuesday. As with other days, where copies of statements or presentations have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on its website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Science and Technology developments

The morning session was on 'Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention' and was chaired by Vice-Chair Cezary Lusinski of Poland.

Prepared statements/presentations were given by: the European Union (from the international organizations seat), Cuba (for the non-aligned), Iran, Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, France, Poland, China, Chile, USA, India, Italy and Mexico. During the morning, there were intervals when the prepared presentations were paused to allow discussion. Contributors to this discussion that did not have a prepared intervention included: Pakistan, UK, Colombia and Australia. The session concluded with the first 'guest of the meeting' presentation by Andrew Pitt (Aston University, UK) who presented his personal expert view on relevant scientific and technical developments.

It was noted that there was a need to understand the implications of scientific developments as well as understanding the developments themselves. There would be benefit in reviewing scientific and technological issues in a regular and consistent manner. There was reference to the convergence of scientific fields, most notably biology and chemistry. One area much discussed was genetic sequencing, for which new methods are getting significantly faster and costs are rapidly falling. However, use of such data to identify diseases can only be effective with global datasets to check against. A number of States Parties indicated views that it would be fairer to have such sequencing capacities around the world rather than provide samples to be sequenced elsewhere.

There was much discussion about the terms 'biosafety' and 'biosecurity' and whether these should be defined nationally or whether there should be international meanings which could then be applied appropriately in differing national contexts. Cuba, in the non-aligned statement, noted there was no international definition. The USA noted that the 2008 Meeting of States Parties (BWC/MSP/2008/5, para 20) had reached a common understanding of these terms. Cuba responded that this was only 'one understanding', not a definition, and so had no status. The UK suggested that the inter-sessional processes were to promote common understandings and if such understandings were to be disregarded later then the purpose of the meetings wasn't clear.

Cooperation and assistance

The afternoon session was on 'Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X', following on from Monday

afternoon. This was chaired by Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria. Prepared statements were given by: Georgia, United Kingdom, Cuba (national capacity), World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Algeria, India, Brazil, Canada, Iran and Interpol. The United States and Australia contributed to discussion. Richard Lennane (ISU) gave further details of the Article X database, on which Nigeria and Colombia contributed to discussion.

Many issues raised during the Monday afternoon session were raised again, although there were some notable new points. Georgia provided details of a bioterrorism workshop and table-top exercise held in cooperation with the USA during 2011. India noted that there is a need to ensure that assistance was not misused and there had to be a balance between Article III and Article X implementation. [Article III obliges States Parties not to assist others to have biological weapons.] Canada noted that its national contribution to the Global Partnership has been extended for five years from April 2013 and invited potential recipients of assistance under this programme to contact the Canadian delegation.

The OIE gave a presentation on its Biological Threat Reduction Strategy and highlighted details of its mandatory disease monitoring and reporting arrangements. A recent development is that the OIE has made arrangements with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs on investigations of alleged use of animal disease as a weapon under the UN Secretary-General's investigative mechanism.

Wider political issues were raised in the room with Cuba suggesting that the blockade on its trade imposed by the USA prevented the purchase of biological materials and technologies for peaceful uses and was thus preventing implementation of Article X. The USA indicated it believed its policy on trade with Cuba was not incompatible with the BWC. Cuba asked for a 'right of reply'. The Chair noted that under the rules of procedure, a right of reply should be 'as brief as possible'. After eight minutes of Cuba speaking, and having already indicated that the right of reply statement was going on too long, the Chair cut the microphone. The delegation of Cuba expressed dissatisfaction with this action.

Poster session

After the afternoon's formal proceedings a poster session was with posters prepared by a number of States Parties, agencies and NGOs on subjects relevant to the topics under discussion at the MX. For those not familiar with poster sessions at scientific conferences, the authors of each poster stand next to it and so can engage with delegates who are interested in the subject matter. This creates an opportunity for focused, yet informal, interaction.

Side events

Two side events were held on Tuesday. The first, before the day's formal proceedings, was convened jointly by the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU) and the University of Bradford on the subject of 'Recent Developments in Education and Awareness Raising on Biosafety and Biosecurity in Ukraine and the UK'. Presentations were given by Olena Kysil (NASU), Masamichi Minehata, Judi Sture and Malcolm Dando (all from Bradford). The event was chaired by Ambassador Serhiy Komisarenko (Ukraine)

The second event, at lunchtime, was convened by the Netherlands and the United States on 'Dual Use Research of Concern: The H5N1 Controversy and its Implications for Science Governance'. The event was introduced and chaired by Ambassador Laura Kennedy (USA). Presentations were given by Larry Kerr (USA), Marianne Donker (Netherlands) and Christopher Park (USA). Representatives of Indonesia and Japan were specifically invited to comment, and billed on the event flyer, as Indonesia was a source of viral strains used in the experiments and one of the researchers was a Japanese national.

This is the third report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Thursday 19th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: the third day

The 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) moved into its third day on Wednesday, with its second session on the topic of science and technology developments and its first on strengthening national implementation.

In parallel with the MX, the Global Partnership (GP) Biosecurity Working Group – representatives of the GP donors together with relevant partners from international bodies dealing with global biological security issues – met in closed session to discuss current priorities and possible future activities.

Science and technology developments

The morning session was on 'Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention', following on from Tuesday morning, and was chaired by Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria, the Chair of the MX. Prepared statements were given by: UK, Germany, Mexico, Japan, Australia (on convergence), Cuba (national capacity), China, Switzerland, India, USA, Brazil, Australia (on codes), Mexico, Spain, Iran and the Netherlands. The session concluded with the two 'guest of the meeting' presentations by Marcus Graf (International Gene Synthesis Consortium) on 'Synthetic Biology: Biosecurity in a Rapidly Emerging Field' and Judi Sture (Bradford University, UK) on 'Biosecurity Education from the University of Bradford: Open-access and Accredited Programmes Available to All'. Many of the issues raised repeated or reinforced points made during the Tuesday morning session. However, the suggested split of discussion sub-topics was more closely followed under this standing agenda item than that for the earlier cooperation and assistance discussions.

It was noted that risk management and mitigation arrangements have to be in proportion to the risks identified. Improvements in the understanding of risks that have to be accounted for when comparing them with benefits are needed. There is a need to be active rather than reactive in monitoring scientific and technological developments and a need to recognise risks and benefits of any particular dual-use research as early as possible.

Many points were made about codes of various sorts with a number of interventions suggesting that contents of codes should be a national prerogative, although some recognised a role for codes within international professional associations. Codes contribute to reducing potential misuse, but are only part of the solution. Codes do not substitute for legal measures and are most effective when they compliment them. India proposed 11 guiding principles for codes. Spain noted that a new codes manual was in preparation. Australia recollected its paper to the MX in 2005 (WP.35) on layers of codes.

There was recognition that codes had a particular overlap with education and awareness raising activities as any code has a useful impact in making researchers consider carefully the consequences of their activities. It was noted that education and awareness raising needed to be on the curricula of educational establishments and should not be treated

as a one-off lesson. The USA described how the Federal Bureau of Investigation has moved into active outreach with biological scientists.

Convergence issues, especially convergence between biology and chemistry were further discussed. There was emphasis that this was about convergence of the sciences and therefore, in consequence, a change in the nature of certain global challenges. This does not mean convergence of the existing Conventions, but awareness of the implications of convergence means that existing provisions could be used more wisely in new contexts.

National implementation

The afternoon session was on 'Strengthening national implementation' and was chaired by Vice-Chair Ambassador Alexandre Fasel of Switzerland. Prepared statements were given by: Cuba (for the non-aligned), the European Union (from the international organizations seat), Malaysia, Canada, Thailand, Iran, France, Belarus, Denmark, China, Australia, Switzerland, Cuba (national capacity), Russia, UK, USA, Chile India and Turkey. There followed a short discussion that included some of the statement contributors plus Mexico.

Many statements outlined existing implementation measures and some indicated forthcoming or planned improvements. A number of interventions referred to details of implementation outlined in Working Papers either already published or forthcoming. Sometimes this implementation is in the form of primary legislation, but often is supported by more detailed regulations. A number of calls were made for a legally binding international instrument to strengthen the Convention, not only for verification but to set global standards which national implementation could follow. It was noted that Article IV of the Convention obliges States Parties to undertake implementation activities.

Many interventions noted that national implementation is never complete, it needs regular review and improvement to face new challenges and incorporate lessons learned. Proposals have been put forward on voluntary methods to evaluate national implementation. One, by Canada and Switzerland, is that of compliance assessment. A second is a peer review mechanism proposed by France at the Seventh Review Conference. In addition, Switzerland noted it had commissioned VERTIC, an NGO, to review its national implementation legislation.

Paul Wilson (Australia), who had been the facilitator during the Seventh Review Conference on the updating of the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) which had included the addition of declarations of legislation, regulation and other measures in relation to biosafety and biosecurity under Form E, urged States Parties to submit details of their national implementation measures in their CBM returns.

Side events

Two side events were held on Wednesday. The first, before the day's formal proceedings, was convened by the United States on 'Global Partnership bio-security activities and how they relate to the BTWC'. Presentations were given by Ambassador Laura Kennedy (USA), Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins (USA), Kristine Beardsley (USA), Piers Millett (ISU) and Ludy Suryantoro (World Health Organization).

The second, at lunchtime, was convened by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on 'The Convergence of Chemistry and Biology: Perspectives of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board Temporary Working Group'. Presentations were given by three Group members: Bob Mathews, Bill Kane and Piers Millett.

This is the fourth report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Friday 20th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: the fourth day

The fourth day of the 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) included sessions on the topics of CBMs and national implementation. The morning also included an unprecedented informal session.

A draft of the report of the MX together with a first iteration of the combined list of proposals made during the meeting were circulated in the meeting room during the morning. Both drafts are based on past practice.

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

The morning session was on 'How to enable fuller participation in the CBMs', the first session of the MX devoted to the topic. Prepared statements were given by: Iran (for the non-aligned), Switzerland, USA, UK, Iran (national capacity), Australia, Belarus, Canada, Russia, South Africa, Germany.

Although CBMs were noted as being important, some interventions stressed that they should not be over-emphasised, while others suggested they were a 'cornerstone' of the Convention. Low participation was raised as a concern, and there were divergent views over whether producing returns is an expected activity of a BWC State Party, a debate that has continued for some years. It was suggested that a better debate might be on what the value of CBMs might be in building confidence. The USA indicated it would support civil society analysis of CBM returns. Canada noted that it would assist in translating some CBM returns into English. Responding to some points raised in discussion, Richard Lennane (ISU) stated that 62 returns had been received so far in 2012. Four states that had not previously submitted had done so this year – Madagascar, Pakistan, Singapore and Zimbabwe.

Informal session on the Meeting

With some time remaining in the morning the Chair of the MX, Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria, adjourned the formal session and convened an informal session to discuss how the MX was proceeding. He presented the room with a number of questions, such as: have the methodology and structure achieved what was hoped for; have the sub-topics corresponded to the objectives of the MX; and, is it possible to bring into the MX the active interactions that happen in the side events?

Ambassador Delmi specifically asked that participants feel free to give their personal views and not speak on behalf of their governments. The idea was to find practical ways to make the most of the Meeting of Experts. Delegates responded with frank and open discussion on how the MX had progressed. The Chair ensured that this discussion was deliberately off-the-cuff. With this in mind, views are not attributed to individuals in the reporting below as many people were providing their spontaneous responses to ideas. NGO representatives in the room were also allowed to contribute to this discussion, which was

unprecedented in the BWC experience. The informal session was described as a tremendous innovation and there were no expressions of opinion opposed to holding it.

Suggestions were made that it might be better to cluster sub-topics better so that presentations on similar themes could be heard together and then a short discussion period would allow focused interaction. The present arrangement in which States Parties are heard in the order in which they come forward leads to a random pattern in subject matter of presentations; indeed, some presentations do not fit with the issues under discussion, so more scheduling of sub-topics could be useful. Other suggestions for focusing discussion included starting a topic with a panel discussion or providing some questions to prompt debate.

The side events were seen as a valuable part of the Meeting process and that their informal nature created a productive working environment. Questions were raised about how informal sessions would fit in with the rules of procedure which prompted the response 'informal is informal'. This did, however, highlight an issue of how any useful output of an informal session could appear in the official records of the Meeting. It was noted that side events often captured real world activities more than the formal sessions. The formal sessions tended to report on what has happened while side events were often looking forwards. Such forward looking is important as the pace of scientific developments is significantly faster than that of political developments. The value of the Meetings as networking opportunities was highlighted and that this aspect should be improved, if possible.

National implementation

The afternoon session was on 'Strengthening national implementation', following on from the session on Wednesday afternoon. Prepared statements were given by: Canada, India, Algeria and China. There followed a discussion that included some of the statement contributors plus UK, Nigeria and USA. The final presentation of the session was a 'guest of the meeting' presentation by Scott Spence (VERTIC) on 'National Implementation of the BWC: a case study'. This prompted further debate and follow-on comment from USA, UK, Belarus, Philippines, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Netherlands, Interpol and Algeria.

The prepared statements from States Parties, by chance, illustrated the diversity of issues that must be encompassed within national implementation, with the presentation from Canada focused on management and control of human pathogens, that from India focused on export controls and that from China covering law enforcement issues. The VERTIC presentation took the form of a scenario intended to prompt thinking about which elements of national legislation would governments find helpful. The scenario revolved around possible further research involving H5N1 avian influenza.

Side event

A breakfast side event was convened by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) on 'A Tested Methodology to Assess Risks of Dual-Use Technologies and Evaluate Governance Options' – based on a new book, 'Innovation, Dual Use and Security: Managing the Risks of Emerging Biological and Chemical Technologies', edited by Jonathan B Tucker who passed away suddenly in July 2011. The event was introduced and chaired by Theresa Hitchens (UNIDIR). Presentations were given by Amy E. Smithson (Center for Nonproliferation Studies) and Ralf Trapp (consultant).

Please note: there will be a sixth report covering the final day of the Meeting of Experts that will be e-mailed out and placed on the website below

This is the fifth report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies of these reports and those from the earlier meetings are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Tuesday 24th July 2012

The 2012 Meeting of Experts: the final day

The final day of the 2012 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) completed its programme of work on Friday 20 July, including adoption of the final report of the Meeting. At the opening of the morning session the Chair of the MX, Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria, noted that it was the first day of Ramadan and wished all those in the room who followed the Islamic faith, and in Geneva, happiness, health and peace.

Adoption of the final report

As with previous practice, a draft of the report of the MX together with drafts of sections of the combined list of proposals and suggestions made during the meeting had been circulated. The report is essentially procedural. As the drafts were acceptable to all delegations, the MX was adjourned in order that typeset copies of the draft report could be printed. At 11.47 the Meeting was reconvened and at 11.51 the report was formally adopted.

In his closing remarks, the Chair noted there had been a spirit of constructiveness and that the Meeting had brought together experts from a variety of backgrounds. He considered the Meeting to have been 'very fruitful'. Australia also made some closing remarks. The Meeting was closed at 12.04.

Side events

There were no side events held on Friday.

Reflections

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report the facts and not give opinion. However, there are many times that the question is raised – 'so what do you think about what happened?' While the role of a commentator should be to try to report what is happening in an impartial manner, there are times that this style of reporting does not convey some of the atmosphere of meetings. The following are some personal reflections that do not necessarily represent anyone's views other than the author's own.

This MX was the first meeting in the third inter-sessional process. There has been significant development of activities since the first inter-sessional process was adopted at the resumed Fifth BWC Review Conference in 2002. The meetings are now much more open and there is a greater interaction with real-world activities. While the BWC remains a creature of the States Parties, those States Parties around the world themselves need to interact with practitioners in the life sciences and it is worth noting that these practitioners also have their own international networks. This is useful progress, yet there is more that could be done to gain further value from the inter-sessional process.

Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi's informal session on Thursday morning enlivened the proceedings. While many of the participants in the discussion in the room had already spoken in formal sessions the atmosphere was much more down to earth. This session also prompted many further discussions outside the room between delegates over coffee. The liveliness continued into the afternoon session that followed. Of all of the issues raised in the informal session, the two that seemed to have the most resonance were about the side events and scheduling of sub-topics. The clearest mark of success of the side events is that, although they were once exclusively convened by NGOs, States Parties and international bodies have been increasingly choosing to convene side events to raise issues for discussion in preference to the main conference room. There may be benefit in some examination of why this is happening and identifying how the benefits of side events, not least their flexibility of format and greater interaction they prompt, could be replicated in the conference room. Clustering presentations by sub-topics so that a number of presentations on a similar theme could be followed by a more focused discussion period before moving on to the next sub-topic would be beneficial. Such scheduling might also allow presenters on similar themes to have a chance to consult each other and this might reduce repetition between presentations.

On Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), it was satisfying to see that four States Parties had each submitted a return for the first time this year – Madagascar, Pakistan, Singapore and Zimbabwe. More still needs to be done to promote the perspective that producing returns should be an expected activity of BWC States Parties (or as one delegate put it: 'politically binding is not a euphemism for voluntary'.) The view that CBMs are a diversion from moving towards classical verification measures is strongly held by some although not always overtly expressed. However, if negotiations towards a verification system were ever to be restarted, a key input into such negotiations would be the experiences of States Parties in putting together the information required for their CBM returns.

The run-up to this Meeting of Experts had suffered from some uncertainty. The Seventh BWC Review Conference had taken decisions in December on what should be in the new inter-sessional process but not how it should operate. This was a rational approach in the circumstances as it was a challenge to get agreement on the package itself. Additional external distractions such as the change of Chair and the political attention on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) negotiations, which drew the focus of work of many disarmament officials away from the BWC during the first half of the year, added to this. The uncertainty meant many participants were not sure precisely what to expect. This may have reduced the numbers of experts travelling to the Meeting. The ATT conference, being held in New York through most of July, drew many Ambassadors away from Geneva for the MX itself. The ATT was not the only diversion. There was a certain irony on Wednesday afternoon that while MX delegates were discussing national implementation issues, including challenges, most of the potential donors for assistance were in a parallel meeting discussing assistance priorities in the Global Partnership Biosecurity Working Group.

The impact of all of these factors on the Meeting, while noticeable, did not significantly impede the work undertaken.

All-in-all, this Meeting of Experts allowed for a productive exchange of information and experiences. There remains within the meeting room hesitation by some delegates to allow meetings to build on previous experience and interactions (the discussion on Tuesday on what is meant by biosafety and biosecurity is a case in point) and more significant progress might be made if this hesitation could be reduced.

This is the sixth and final report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which was held from 16 to 20 July 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies of these reports and those from the earlier meetings are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

The author can be contacted via <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.