

Friday 15th April 2011

The BWC Preparatory Committee: the second and final day

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Seventh Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) was resumed on Thursday with the continuation of consultations on the PrepCom final report regarding the rules of procedure. However, during the day it was possible to find solutions to all of the outstanding issues and conclude the proceedings of the PrepCom without needing to go into Friday.

Consultations on openness of meetings

The PrepCom's proceedings started with open-ended informal consultations in a side room. These consultations commenced with a modified proposal that the relevant meetings of committees at the Review Conference would be open unless a decision to close any individual one was taken. After a hour of consultations, a markedly different outcome was agreed. This would assume that relevant committee meetings would be closed unless specific decisions to open them was taken. As soon as the consultations finished, which had taken about an hour, a formal session was started in the main room and the modified paragraph was adopted. States pressing for this outcome indicated that they were not opposed to civil society involvement, and some stressed within the private session that they valued the benefits of interactions with outside bodies.

The agreed paragraph read: 'The Preparatory Committee also agreed to recommend that with respect to meetings referred to in Rule 43(2), the Committees may decide to hold certain meetings in public.'

Wrapping up the PrepCom

The meeting restarted after lunch, again in closed session, to discuss the agenda of the Review Conference. Agreement was fairly rapidly reached on slight rearrangement of items. As part of this agreement, the following text appeared in paragraph 19 of the PrepCom report: 'the Chairman noted his understanding that the agenda was sufficiently comprehensive to facilitate a broad and thorough review of all aspects of the Convention, and that it would allow States Parties opportunity to raise and discuss fully all issues they believe are relevant ...'.

At roughly 15.35 the meeting moved on to agenda item 9, 'other business' and moved into open session. A number of statements were made by States Parties and these are outlined below.

The meeting was suspended at 16.35 to allow time for sufficient copies of the draft report (document number BWC/CONF.VII/PC/CRP.1) to be printed for delegates to read and approve. From around 17.30, the draft report was examined paragraph by paragraph in the resumed meeting. Some uses of terms or phrases prompted questions from delegations, most of which simply required clarification as to why particular words had been chosen – mostly this was focused on the reliance on precedent in international meetings and documentation. The report was adopted at 17.47 and will appear as document BWC/CONF.VII/PC/2.

Following the usual closing formalities – such as the coordinators of the regional groups offering their thanks to the work of the Chairman, the ISU, the meeting support staff and interpreters – the Chairman offered some closing remarks. As well as thanking those that had assisted the smooth conduct of the meeting, he noted that the PrepCom had paved the way for a comprehensive review of the Convention in December and that now the procedural matters were complete there was a need to move on to substance. The gavel came down for the final time to conclude the meeting at 17.54.

The timings have been included in the above paragraphs simply to illustrate that much of the work of this sort of international meeting is done in consultations and that, once it is clear what solutions are likely to work, the formal proceedings are relatively swift.

Agenda item 9 statements

States Parties made statements, or other interventions, in the following order: Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned states), Chile, India, Indonesia (as a joint statement with Norway), Cuba (national statement), Mexico, Philippines, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, United States, Nigeria, Kenya, Germany, Pakistan, Australia and France.

These statements were primarily about hopes and expectations for the Review Conference. Article X featured prominently, particularly in the non-aligned statements. A workshop held in Montreaux the weekend before the PrepCom was highlighted as an example of a cross-regional partnership (its co-chairs were Indonesia and Norway). Many statements referred positively to the work of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and suggested its mandate be continued past 2011. There were some notable points from individual statements. India, noting the focus on Confidence-Building Measures, indicated that these were not declarations and were no substitute for effective verification arrangements. The Philippines highlighted a relevant ASEAN Regional Forum workshop to be held in Manilla in September. One of the Pakistan statements focused on the role of scientific collaboration in the Islamic world. Kenya noted that it was close to concluding its biosecurity policy which should be presented to parliament this year and that it would be hosting a regional universality workshop this year. The second Pakistan statement included a suggestion that the ISU produce a consolidated report of its activities in the past five years.

Side Events

Two side events were held on Thursday. The first, before the start of the day's proceedings, was convened by the Inter-Academy Panel, IUMS and the US National Academies on the topic of 'Trends in Science and Technology Relevant to the BTWC: An International Workshop'. Presentations were given by Rod Flowers (William Harvey Research Institute) and Ralf Trapp (Consultant) on the Beijing workshop held in October-November 2010. The event was chaired by Jo Husbands (IAP). The summary report from the conference can be found at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13113>.

The lunchtime event was on the topic of 'Options to revise the Confidence-Building Measures of the Biological Weapons Convention' and was convened by the Geneva Forum <<http://www.geneva-forum.org>>. Opening remarks were given by Hilde Skorpen (Norway) and draft proposals based on the outcome of seminars organized by the Geneva Forum to be put forward as a Working Paper to the Review Conference by the three countries acting together were outlined by Reto Wollenmann (Switzerland) and Volker Beck (Germany). The event was chaired by David Atwood (Geneva Forum).

This is the third and final report from the Preparatory Committee for the Seventh BWC Review Conference which is being held from 13 to 15 April 2011 in Geneva. The Review Conference itself will be held during 5-22 December. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings.

The reports have been prepared by Richard Guthrie (<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>) on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports from this meeting and all BWC meetings starting from the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.