

Tuesday 9th August 2016

The re-opening of the BWC Preparatory Committee: general exchange of views

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Eighth Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) re-opened on Monday morning with Ambassador György Molnár of Hungary in the Chair. There were more participants in the room than there had been during the April meetings, including what seems to be a greater level of representation from capitals. The day's first substantive agenda item was formal adoption of procedural decisions regarding the Review Conference, followed by a general exchange of views which formed most of the work of the day.

The Chair, in his opening remarks, welcomed the delegation of Haiti, a signatory state, and noted that if it ratified the Convention there would be universal membership in the Caribbean and Latin America region. [A second signatory state, Somalia, also attended the afternoon meeting.] Ambassador Molnár noted that 35 experts from 24 countries had received assistance to attend, sponsored via the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) administered programme, a significant increase on previous BWC meetings. The sponsors are Australia, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland and the European Union.

Review Conference procedural decisions

Formal decisions taken included the distribution of Review Conference office holders between the regional groups (the actual posts to be filled in November), adoption of the provisional agenda, and the adoption of the rules of procedure (with relevant paragraphs relating to evolution of practice to be inserted into the procedural report of the PrepCom).

General exchange of views

Delegations taking the floor for the general exchange of views were: Iran (for the non-aligned), China, Russia, USA, Germany, Ukraine, Brazil, Pakistan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Italy, Ireland, Turkey, Netherlands, South Africa, France and Cuba before the lunch break; with Spain, Algeria, Poland, Serbia, Australia, Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Belarus, UK, Ecuador, Nigeria, India, Colombia, Kenya, Iran (national), Peru, Angola, EU and International Committee of the Red Cross in the afternoon. This was followed by an informal plenary in which the following NGOs were able to address delegations: University of London, University of Bradford, VERTIC, Biosecure Ltd, Research Group for Biological Arms Control (Hamburg University), Pax Christi International, and Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Owing to time constraints, some NGO statements were held over to Tuesday morning. Some delegations made specific proposals, some made general statements and some made reference to their general statements made in April and followed up on specific points in this session. Where copies of statements are provided by those that gave them, these will be added to the ISU website.

There was more substantive material put forward on Monday than has been raised at many recent BWC meetings, so there is not space to cover it all within this daily report. As the programme of work for Tuesday is dedicated to 'cross-cutting issues',

including those such as science and technology (S&T) developments, future programme of work, ISU, etc., reporting on contributions to the general debate that would fall within these topics will be held over to the next report.

Angola took the floor for the first time as a BWC State Party. Many delegations included a specific welcome to Angola and Côte d'Ivoire who had both joined the Convention during 2016. Encouragement was given to other countries to join the BWC.

The large number of working papers submitted to the PrepCom was seen as a measure of vitality, with 19 of these formally published, out of a total of roughly 30 submitted (with indications given that more should be expected). It is hard to directly compare this number with previous years as the earlier Review Conferences were not preceded by a PrepCom that could deal with substantive matters. [Note: the web address for the UN document server given in Monday's report had additional characters inadvertently added; the correct address is <<http://documents.un.org>>.]

There were many welcomes for what were often described as concrete proposals, but there were a number of questions about balances raised – balances between emphasis on the various articles of the BWC; balances between security and scientific development; and balances between security and economic development. Positions taken on where such balances lie were clearly influenced by geographical, political and economic factors.

Human and economic impacts of infectious disease were noted. Resilience preparedness to reduce the impact of biological threats (to provide national protection and to enhance capacities for Article VII assistance) was a focus of some statements, including proposals to enhance mobile laboratory capacities, for example. Further responses to alleged use of biological weapons were noted, with some delegations indicating they had updated their lists of experts for the UN Secretary-General's investigative mechanism.

On transparency issues, some delegations noted their submissions for inclusion in the Review Conference background information documents on the subjects of compliance, Article VII, and Article X and encouraged other countries to do the same. [The submissions have been posted to the ISU page for the Review Conference, under the 'advance versions' tab, rather than on the PrepCom page.] Peer review is a transparency-related activity promoted by particular States Parties and updates on recent developments were provided. The record submissions in 2016 for the system of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) in 2016 were noted. Encouragement to others to participate in the CBM arrangements was given, but it was also noted that CBM submissions should not be used to assess compliance.

Side events

Two side events were held on Monday during the lunch break. One was convened by Ukraine and the US National Academy of Sciences on 'Supporting Effective BWC Implementation: Education, Outreach, and Policy Advice'. Presentations were given by Serhiy Komisarenko (National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), Zabta Khan Shinwari (Pakistan Academy of Sciences), Bert Rima (Queen's University, Belfast), and Peter McGrath (Inter-Academy Panel). The event was co-chaired by Serhiy Komisarenko and Jo Husbands (NAS). The other was convened by the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) on 'Partnering with Industry: Key Considerations for National Public Health Preparedness Planning' with presentations from Jacob Thorup Cohn (Bavarian Nordic), Jean-Luc Martre, (Medicago, Inc.) and Niranjan Y. Sardesai (Inovio Pharmaceuticals). The event was chaired by Phyllis Arthur (BIO).

This is the second report from the August meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Eighth BWC Review Conference which is a continuation of the PrepCom session in April. 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 <<http://www.bwpp.org>> and <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>.

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