

Monday 21st November 2016

First reactions to the draft elements, and the 'alternative BWC'

The tenth day of the Review Conference marked the end of the second week of proceedings. Delegations were provided with the opportunity to air their views on the 'Elements for a Draft Final Document' non-paper that had been circulated on Thursday. In the evening, the latest round was held of the alternative BWC – the Bowling World Cup.

Solemn declaration

The morning was taken up by a short further plenary session on the Solemn declaration with Ambassador Boudjemâa Delmi of Algeria as facilitator on this subject. Some limited progress was made on textual changes. A small room consultation behind closed doors was convened in the afternoon, in parallel with the plenary, which is said to have made some further progress on the Solemn declaration.

'Elements for a Draft Final Document' – an outline

The non-paper circulated on Thursday by the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador György Molnár of Hungary combined the 'best guess' text from the Chair of the Committee of the Whole (CoW) with drafts resulting from the work of the facilitators and has no formal status. The draft elements text follows the basic structure of the Final Documents of the previous two Review Conferences.

The CoW text has been seen in a number of earlier versions and there is still much to be resolved within it. The second section, the forward-looking decisions and recommendations, outlines an inter-sessional work programme totalling 15 days per year (it was 10 per year last time) comprising three open-ended working groups (OEWGs) and a Science and Technology Committee (STC). The three OEWGs are on Implementation, Cooperation [based around Article X issues], and Preparedness and Assistance [based around Article VII issues]. It has to be emphasised that this non-paper is a very early iteration of the sort of material that might be in the Final Document. However, as always with this type of negotiation, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

'Elements for a Draft Final Document' – first reactions

The plenary session in the afternoon gave space for delegations to give their first public response to the non-paper on draft elements. The President indicated that the aim of this plenary was to get general comments rather than issues with specific elements. He acknowledged during the discussions there were some inconsistencies between the sections drafted by the facilitators owing to time constraints in putting the document together.

Most delegations taking the floor indicated there were parts of the non-paper they were comfortable with and parts they would not be able to agree on. A number indicated that the overall package contained elements that would cross their red lines. There were no suggestions that this would be close to the Final Document; indeed, there were many suggestions that there was going to be a considerable amount of effort needed to bring the work of the Review Conference to its conclusion.

The nature of diplomatic language is that no delegation put themselves in the position of rejecting the text out of hand and most of the interventions focused on the elements around which consensus might be achieved. Nevertheless, Iran indicated that the non-paper did not enjoy its support and was not a benchmark that could be used, noting that the work of the Review Conference needed consensus, not simply the views of the majority.

Venezuela, speaking for the non-aligned, suggested that the non-paper did not reflect NAM views as expressed in the CoW, and would like to return to the third reading text rather than the Chair's 'best guess'. Russia suggested that many ideas by its delegation and from the NAM had been ignored and so, from its perspective, the article-by-article review contained a bias towards the West.

There were a variety of phrases used about elements of the text, primarily regarding the forward-looking section as this was the first time this had been seen compiled together. Canada said there were some 'good solid ideas' but said some were 'problematic'. Malaysia described some elements as 'not fully matured', but that challenges to bring the Final Document together were not insurmountable. Debate was expected. Australia noted that there would be strong critiques of the text. Pakistan, indicated it knew the amalgam of material in the non-paper would not satisfy all, and would therefore be subject to discussion.

On the content of the inter-session programme, a number of delegations suggested that there would not be enough time to carry out an examination of all of the topics and sub-topics. It was noted that the topic list was, in some cases, simply a listing of what had been suggested without any attempt to prioritize them. If there were too many topics, it was suggested that there might be a dilution of effort. India, said that the topics were substantive but needed to be more succinct and specific. One topic likely to be controversial is the suggestion that up to one day each year be used to 'consider appropriate measures on a legally binding instrument, including verification'. Cuba suggested there was not enough about verification in the non-paper. The USA said nothing about this, but if past practice is a guide, is likely to oppose inclusion of such a suggestion.

Questions were raised about financial implications. The suggestion of five extra working days for the work programme and two further ISU staff would mean additional costs and there were requests for calculations to be made. The UK suggested the finance sub-section should include a reminder that assessed dues are needed in advance. Iran suggested the work programme structure and topics needed to be made to fit the purposes of the Convention first and budgetary considerations could then follow.

On timing, India and the UK both noted that it was good to have something to consider before the start of the third week.

In his concluding remarks, the President noted that further discussion on the article-by-article review would be based on the third reading text, taking note of the 'best guess' text.

Bowled over

The alternative BWC, the 'Bowling World Cup', was hosted by Switzerland at a bowling alley on Friday evening. While there were no official prizes this year, the highest scorer in an individual game was Robert Friedman (USA). The Bowling World Cup had been started around 1998 and continued through various Convention meetings until the political challenges of 2001. The revival of this tradition in 2006 was taken as an optimistic sign that a positive outcome may be reached at the Sixth Review Conference, as indeed it was.

Side events There were no side events on Friday.

This is the eleventh report from the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). These reports have been produced for all official BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. A subscription link is available on each page.

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