

CWC Review Conference Report

Start of the second week: Picking up the pace

The Second five-yearly Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) started its second week on Monday with a concerted effort to complete the paragraph-by-paragraph read through of the 'informal text' by the end of the night. Activities were much the same as the previous Friday – informal consultations in the framework of the Committee of the Whole, with Ambassador Benchaâ Dani (Algeria) in the Chair, and held behind closed doors in the Ieper Room in the OPCW building. The consultations stretched into the evening, finally finishing at 8.40pm. The overnight version of the informal text now contains 40 pages of draft declaration compared with 29 in the version just prior to the Conference. The issues raised are hard to summarize as they covered most aspects of implementation of the Convention, although there were few surprises on the positions taken by individual states.

Despite the time taken, there was a strong feeling, especially amongst NAM group states that this paragraph-by-paragraph 'first reading' was valuable. This seems to reflect a perception that the text that was presented at the start of the Review Conference emerged from a process in which they did not have full participation. Delegates from Western states seem to hold the opposite perspective, believing that NAM views expressed in the preparatory process were fairly reflected in the informal text. This disparity in perception is a key contributor to the divide between the two sides.

Even with brackets inserted into individual paragraphs, there are still some sensitivities regarding the emphasis on different issues within the overall text. Some states are concerned that the text is unbalanced in its coverage – noting, for example, that destruction issues are dealt with in two pages of text, whereas industry verification issues warrant five pages. A counter-argument is that quality of text, not quantity, is a better measure of the importance of an issue. In the case of industry verification, this is a major part of the activities of the OPCW and therefore there is a need for thorough examination of the issues involved; whereas destruction is the responsibility of particular states parties who would probably be under more pressure from one consensus paragraph of strong language pressing them to keep to the deadlines than from many pages of soft language. Regardless of how it is measured, the question of the balance within the draft is the subject of strongly held views.

Occasional small huddles of delegates looking at particular issues have been emerging to try to bring together ideas for consensus text as the next stage will be to go through the text again to find solutions that will enable the removal of brackets that now exist in most of the paragraphs. It is not clear what process will be selected to do this – a decision likely to be taken at the Review Conference's general committee on Tuesday morning.

Importing of text from other documents

In cases where there are difficulties in making progress on text in relevant areas in this Conference, there may be suitable text that could be adapted from the consensus final declaration of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Sixth Review Conference at the end of 2006. There are some common issues between the two Conventions, such as universality, the need for national implementation and perceptions of threat.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between final declarations in the two Conventions which must be taken into account. In the BWC, any calls for action are implemented by states parties (apart from the activities of the three-person Implementation Support Unit) and so the states themselves individually decide what resources to allocate to the tasks. For the CWC, much of the activity to implement the final declaration will be by the OPCW and so this has budgetary implications for the Organization. Moreover, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has to ensure that any proposed implementation activities are capable of being implemented in an effective manner as part of a balanced programme of work.

Rising role of the NAM in the CWC

As noted in *Report no 2*, much of the work of Review Conferences is done through regional groups. The CWC has five such groups for which the titles are given within the Convention: Africa; Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC); and Western European and Other States (WEOG), although the Convention itself does not define which states fall within which group. The CWC was concluded in the immediate post-Cold War era when there was a general perception that the eastern bloc, western bloc and non-aligned groupings traditionally used in arms control agreements were a thing of the past. In both the First and the Second Review Conference the only regional group to have made a collective statement was the African group.

It is clear that a number of states find it more productive to carry out policy coordination through NAM arrangements rather than through the regional structures of the CWC. For some it may simply be that they find it easier to use arrangements familiar to them from other similar contexts, such as the BWC. In addition, the two most recent NAM coordinators – Cuba and Malaysia – have been particularly active in these areas. For CWC purposes, the NAM grouping includes China. Some of the inputs into the Review Conference have been submitted in the name of the NAM, but it is not clear at this stage as to how much policy is uniform across the group. For example, while there is undoubtedly a clear set of core values that have been common themes for a number of years – particularly with regard to issues such as ensuring the CWC does not hinder economic development or the role of the Convention and the OPCW in international co-operation and assistance – there is also undoubtedly a number of different approaches taken by members of the group to these values.

EU side event

During Monday lunchtime, the European Union held a side event entitled 'EU Action in Support of OPCW Activities 2005-2008: Effective Multilateralism in Practice' which focused on recent activities under relevant EU Joint Actions. In a packed programme, the event heard from Ambassador Tea Petrin (Slovenia [EU Presidency]), OPCW Director-General Rogelio Pflirter and the EU High Representative's Personal Representative on non-proliferation Annalisa Giannella who each gave overviews on EU activities. Presentations were then given on workshops in Rome and Algiers and on the OPCW Industry & Protection Forum – all of which were EU funded. The last section of the event looked at specific EU projects in Uganda, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Sri Lanka and north Africa and on the laboratory assistance programme run by VERIFIN (Finnish Institute for the Verification of the CWC).

This is the seventh report from the Second Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention which is being held from 7 to 18 April 2008 in The Hague. These reports are designed to help people who are not in The Hague to follow the proceedings and are prepared by Richard Guthrie with financial support from the Ploughshares Fund <<<http://www.ploughshares.org>>>.

Copies of these reports (and details of how to subscribe to them by e-mail) are available on the CBW Events website at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>> and via the NGO resources page at <<<http://cwc2008.org>>>. Richard Guthrie can be contacted during the Review Conference on +31 620 901 205 or <<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>>.