

Sunday 10th August 2025

The Sixth Session of the BWC Working Group: setting the scene

The Sixth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) is scheduled to convene in Geneva from 11 to 22 August 2025. The WG was established by the Ninth BWC Review Conference (2022) with seven specific topics listed in paragraph 8 of part II of its final report. These are: (a) international cooperation and assistance (ICA) under Article X; (b) scientific and technological (S&T) developments relevant to the BWC; (c) confidence-building and transparency; (d) compliance and verification; (e) national implementation of the Convention; (f) assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII; and (g) organizational, institutional and financial arrangements. It was suggested that the S&T review and international cooperation and assistance (ICA) mechanisms should be dealt with as additional topics as the relevant paragraphs recording the decision of the Review Conference to work towards establishment of each of these mechanisms (paras. 18 and 19 respectively) included the wording: ‘In order for this mechanism to be established, the Working Group on the strengthening of the Convention will make appropriate recommendations.’

There have been a number of personnel changes as is usual in multi-year multilateral processes. The First WG Session appointed Ambassador Flávio Damico (Brazil) as Chair with Ambassador Camille Petit (France) and Irakli Jgenti (Georgia) as Vice-Chairs. When Ambassador Damico moved to another post in 2024, his compatriot, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer, took up the Chair. The tenure of this initial team was to the end of 2024. Agreement was reached that these people should remain in their posts for 2025. However, a routine rotation means that Ambassador Petit is moving to another posting. The WG is expected to appoint a new Vice-Chair as part of its opening formalities. Other rotations mean that there are some changes to the ‘Friends of the Chair’. These will be listed as each topic is reported.

This session is scheduled to deal with five topics – ICA (Mon 11/Tues 12), S&T developments (Weds 13/Thurs 14), confidence-building and transparency (Fri 15/Mon 18), compliance and verification (Tues 19/Weds 20), and national implementation (Thurs 21/Fri 22). Informal consultations will be convened during the session to discuss the two other paragraph 8 topics. There may also be informal consultations on the rolling text (see below)

Proceedings for public meetings will be video streamed via UN WebTV at <https://media.un.org/en/webtv/> and audio streamed via Listen Live at <https://listen-live.unog.ch/en/index.html> Official documents and other materials are being posted by the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to the official web page of the Sixth Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/75240/>

BWC membership

Since the group last met in December 2024 there have been two additions to the membership of the BWC. Comoros deposited its instrument of accession on 14 February with Kiribati depositing its instrument on 20 May, becoming the 188th and 189th BWC states parties, respectively. All Asia-Pacific countries are now parties to the Convention

with only eight states across the rest of the world that have neither ratified nor acceded (although some have signed). Universalization issues are not specifically discussed in the WG as they are within the remit of the annual BWC Meeting of States Parties (MSP) held at the end of each calendar year; however, the MSP in each of 2023 and 2024 has not been able to hold substantive discussions.

Rolling Text

There have been a number of activities since the Fifth Session in efforts to make progress towards consensus. These have included regional seminars, for example. The Chair has been active in engagement with delegations. On 28 July, the Chair wrote to states parties with a 'rolling text'. This was then reproduced a week later as [CRP.1](#) of the Sixth Session, entitled 'Draft specific and effective measures, including possible legally-binding measures, to strengthen and institutionalize the Biological Weapons Convention in all its aspects' and posted on the WG6 website. This had been preceded by an 'elements paper' in May, based on the work carried out in the first five sessions. Feedback from delegations on the elements paper informed the drafting of the rolling text. During a UNDIR webinar the week before WG6, Ambassador Meyer described the rolling text as a tool rather than an outcome in itself. He hoped it would focus discussion on practical questions and so lead to consensus text. He noted there was no language included on the two proposed mechanisms as he would discuss these in a parallel track.

Anniversaries and a possible Special Conference

The Ninth Review Conference was explicit in encouraging the Working Group to complete its work before the end of 2025, if possible – the year that marks the centenary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol and 50 years since the entry into force of the BWC. Many delegates had hoped that these two anniversaries would help focus discussion as this would be a fitting point in which to show significant progress in strengthening the Convention. A proposal during 2024 to hold a Special Conference in 2025 to adopt the two mechanisms had gained substantial momentum but was brought to a sudden halt near the end of WG5 by the expression by one delegation, Russia, of an interpretation of the WG mandate which was not shared by those that wanted to convene the Special Conference in these circumstances. Following past practice, it would not be possible to conclude an outcome at a Special Conference without agreement by consensus. A number of delegations submitted a working paper (WP.21) to the MSP providing their interpretation of the mandate entitled 'On a Special Conference and the ICA and S&T mechanisms'. This was sponsored by: Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Samoa, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Timor-Leste and USA. Some commentators have noted the fiftieth anniversary year for the BWC lasts until March 2026.

Publication schedule for these reports

For each topic under formal discussion, a 'setting the scene' report will be circulated beforehand, so that the one on international cooperation and assistance will be published on Monday and a discussion of the proceedings on the topic can be published on Wednesday. The gap on Tuesday allows for the publication of the setting the scene report on S&T developments. This pattern will be followed over the two weeks. This has been found to be more useful to many readers than a report on the proceedings each day.

Reports in this series from the first five Working Group Sessions (and earlier BWC meetings) are available from the links provided below.

These reports have been produced by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) for all BWC meetings with NGO registration since the Sixth Review Conference (2006). They are available from <https://www.bwpp.org/reports.html> and <https://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>. A subscription link is available on each webpage. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.