

Monday 8th December 2025

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

The Seventh 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 8 to 12 December 2025. The Chair of the WG is Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) with Ambassador Anne Lazar-Sury (France) and Irakli Jgenti (Georgia) as Vice-Chairs.

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 Seventh Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/75242/>.

WG7 will be followed by the annual BWC Meeting of States Parties (MSP) which is scheduled for 15 to 17 December. The MSP in each of 2023 and 2024 was not been able to hold substantive discussions although some delegates have indicated a sense there are stronger prospects for a substantive MSP this year.

Background to the Working Group

The WG was established by the Ninth BWC Review Conference (2022) to examine measures under 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. The Review Conference also proposed two mechanisms should be established – on S&T review and on ICA/Article X – with the relevant paragraphs (paras. 18 and 19 respectively) including the wording: ‘In order for this mechanism to be established, the Working Group on the strengthening of the Convention will make appropriate recommendations.’

The agreement on the WG mandate marked a significant step forward in the potential to strengthen the Convention after previous inconclusive processes; the most notable of which had been negotiations for a legally-binding protocol to strengthen the BWC which had started in the 1990s and which were brought to a halt in 2001.

Apart from the First Session of the WG (which dealt with administrative matters) each WG session has had a draft programme of work in which substantive topics were assigned for discussion on each day. WG7 seems likely to follow a different pattern as there is now a draft decision which will be the focus for discussion across the whole week. This is likely to include informal consultations as well as plenary meetings.

The Ninth Review Conference was explicit in encouraging the WG to complete its work before the end of 2025, if possible – the year that marks the centenary of the signing of the 1925 Geneva Protocol and 50 years since entry into force of the BWC. Many officials and commentators have hoped that these anniversaries would help bring

focus to WG activities as this would be a fitting year in which to show significant progress in strengthening the Convention.

The WG has spent considerable time examining the topics allocated to it by the Ninth Review Conference and there is a clearly expressed desire from many delegations across the regional groupings that the time has come to move the discussion forwards, as envisioned by the Review Conference.

The draft decision for adoption by the Working Group

The Chair has been working on a draft decision document for adoption by the WG. This has been circulated to states parties in a number of iterations and has been the subject of a number of informal consultations. The draft has evolved out of the efforts to produce a ‘rolling text’, a version of which was circulated at the Sixth Session that itself was based on the work done by the Friends of the Chair (FoCs) on the different issue areas. This means that the draft decision has had the widest possible range of inputs into its evolution.

As anything agreed by the WG would have to be a formal decision by the Group, the text has now been recast as a draft decision document; the latest version of which was circulated to states parties by the Chair the week before the Seventh Session. This latest version, which bears the document number [BWC/WG/7/CRP.1](#), has two annexes, the first of which contains recommendations in relation to the seven paragraph 8 topics and the second contains recommendations in relation to the mechanisms proposed under paragraph 18 and 19.

External developments

While the geopolitical situation continues to be a challenging context in which to reach multilateral consensus on any issue, there have been a number of positive BWC-relevant steps since WG6 in August.

There have been a number of international meetings in which the efforts of the WG featured. In recent weeks these have included BWC regional workshops in Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago), Guangzhou (China) and Nairobi (Kenya). An international conference was held in New Delhi, organized by the Government of India during 1-2 December, on ‘50 Years of BWC: Strengthening Biosecurity for the Global South’.

BWC issues featured prominently in many statements in the First Committee debates in the UN General Assembly. In the UNGA plenary, US President Trump spoke of ‘pioneering an AI verification system that everyone can trust’ to control biological weapons. While it is not clear to outsiders where this political initiative stemmed from, it is indicative that the BWC and its verification issues are gaining greater political attention. [Note: the statement implied this would be a shared AI system; if so, this might raise a number of questions – e.g., could the information a verification AI system is trained on include nationally classified information with the consequent risks of this being leaked? An inherent problem of AI systems is that in most cases it is not possible to see how any particular system produced its outputs – would a global AI system supporting verification be trusted if there is no clear understanding of this?]

On 27 November China released a new policy paper ‘China’s Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation in the New Era’ in which it noted ‘China is firmly committed to the purposes and objectives of the BWC; it supports the strengthening and institutionalization of the Convention in all its aspects, and advocates the conclusion through negotiation of a legally binding protocol with an effective verification mechanism to reinforce the authority, effectiveness, and universality of the Convention.’

About these reports

Reports in this series from the first six Working Group Sessions (and earlier BWC meetings) are available from the link 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.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html> where a subscription link is available. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.