

Monday 15th December 2025

Closure of WG7, some reflections, and on to the Meeting of States Parties

The Seventh Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) came to a close on Friday, having been unable to complete the work to adopt a final report. At the start of proceedings for the day, the Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), announced that the WG would reconvene for an Eighth Session for the week of 9-13 February 2026. WG7 adopted a procedural report which was uncontroversial as it simply recorded information such as that the session had been convened and listed what documents had been submitted, including four working papers.

By the close of the meeting at 17.49 on Friday, WG7 was just starting on the top of page 21 of the Chair's 29-page draft report from 1 December. On closing the meeting, the Chair noted that around half of the draft final report was marked in green indicating that the text had been agreed. A revised version of the draft final report has been circulated as BWC/WG/7/CRP.1/Rev.1, dated 12 December. The revised version is 33 pages long.

Discussions on the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) mechanism

Apart from a short time taken for the procedural report, the whole of the plenary time on Friday was used for discussion of the draft decision on the proposed ICA mechanism that formed Annex II of the draft final report of the WG. As with discussion on other parts of the ICA mechanism, there was much reopening of old debating points. The focus on Friday was on the terms of reference of the ICA Steering Group – the smaller body that will oversee the work of the Mechanism in detail. As before, the composition of the body was a point of contention, as was its relationship with the wider body, the ICA Advisory Group, composed of all states parties. Although there were agreements on some points there were no spectacular breakthroughs. The informal role of Husham Ahmed of Pakistan should be noted. On top of his activities as a Friend of the Chair on organizational, institutional and financial matters, he gathered diplomats together in small groups to seek consensus text on some issues where divergent perspectives had been slowing down proceedings.

Reflections on the Working Group

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report as objectively as possible. However, there are times that this style of reporting does not convey some of the atmosphere of meetings or possible consequences of activities. The following are some personal reflections that do not necessarily represent anyone's views other than the author's own.

A lack of a common understanding of what would constitute success for the proposed ICA Mechanism was notable. Perhaps the simplest would be whether the new process brings more funding into this area. In other words, if all that happens is funding gets funnelled through the Mechanism for projects that would have taken place in any case, then the creation of the Mechanism will simply have been a paper exercise. It is striking how few times, either during WG7 or in the prior substantive sessions, any

delegates raised questions about designing the mechanism to attract funding that would not have already been available. Moreover, many amendment proposals to the Mechanism were from delegates who clearly have never worked on a development activity. Just as there have been gaps in understandings between scientists and policy practitioners, there are also gaps between policy practitioners and project implementers. It might be useful if states parties could bring more project implementers into the room who could share their experiences and so help WG8 reach practical outcomes.

Many of the proceedings in WG7 were frustratingly repetitive. Any diplomat should know that if a position you held was not agreed with by any other delegation in the room during the substantive discussions of a series of meetings, then trying to amend the draft final report of those proceedings to reflect that position was unlikely to be successful. Moreover, that diplomat would also know that bringing forward such an amendment would most likely be interpreted as you being unconcerned about taking up time of other delegates to reopen discussions where positions had been clearly stated. And yet this happened repeatedly from one delegation, Iran.

There was a concerted effort by a few delegations to emphasise a desire for consensus decisions within any activities to follow on from the WG. It would be interesting to know, but diplomatically challenging to ask, which of these delegates knew what their predecessors in their own delegations had said in response to issues of consensus around the Ad Hoc Group (AHG) after the United States had indicated it could not agree to anything that might have come out of it. The need for consensus meant the AHG was brought to a halt. If there had not been a need for consensus, the work of the AHG could have continued, as a number of delegates had called for at the time.

There was an unsung hero of the week – the intern with the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) who was editing the live version of the draft report on the screen (and who indicated a preference to not being named). This task was carried out with impressive fluency and accuracy, for example in placing square brackets where proposed amendments amended other proposed amendments. The proceedings during the week would have been slowed further if it were not for such a diligent and focused effort.

Setting the scene for the Meeting of States Parties

There are only a couple of things that can be said with confidence about the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP) this year – the confirmed aspects are its scheduled dates and that Ambassador Clare Walsh (Australia) has been appointed as Chair.

The only MSPs held since the last BWC Review Conference in 2022 have been minimal procedural affairs, essentially reduced to taking formal decisions required to convene BWC activities the following year. The lack of substantive MSPs has revolved around objections raised by Russia on how observers might participate in the Meeting. This has prevented adoption of the Rules of Procedure which, in turn, prevents the holding of a substantive MSP.

There is a provisional agenda for MSP 2025 that includes items such as management of the intersessional programme (which includes budgetary and financial matters), progress with universalization of the BWC, and the annual report of the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) – none of which have been properly discussed since the Review Conference. The MSP will set dates for WG meetings in 2026. With dates for WG8 in February decided, there remains a question whether the time for this will be taken from meeting time pencilled in for August or December 2026.

Had the WG completed its work in adopting its final report by consensus there would have been considerable pressure to be able to move that process forward and that would have meant holding a substantive MSP. With the WG now reconvening in 2026 those pressures are not there.

In short, it is hard to predict what might happen at the MSP this year.

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>.