

Tuesday 10th February 2026

The BWC Working Group: a move from yellow to green but much uncoloured

The Eighth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) in the Chair. In his opening remarks he stressed that to make progress delegations will have up to three minutes for a first intervention on any paragraph; should further interventions be required after new language is proposed from the floor, a second intervention on the same paragraph may not exceed two minutes. The opening formalities were brief.

There were few significant advances, but numerous movements towards consensus on particular aspects. Nevertheless, there were many areas where divergences seem as marked as before. At the end of the day there was much more text highlighted in green than there had been at the beginning. There remains much unhighlighted text brought forward from earlier drafts. Where proposals have been suggested by delegates, but are not agreed by all, these are indicated in the text using square brackets.

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The move from yellow to green and additional text

In line with his announced plan of work, the Chair moved through the paragraphs in document [BWC/WG/8/CRP.1/Rev.1](#) that were highlighted in yellow indicating that they had been agreed during the informal consultations held between WG7 and WG8. Most of these achieved agreement in plenary and so became green-highlighted text. Some of the paragraphs were not agreed to because of new amendments being proposed or because delegates had felt related paragraphs should be agreed first. The second workstream was new text introduced by the Chair which had not been previously discussed. While there remained some outstanding issues, a number of the proposals allowed for agreement on some previously parked paragraphs.

Just before lunch, the Chair announced he would ask certain delegates to coordinate what he described as ‘small groups’ to try and achieve agreement on particular points. The selected points were: the cross-cutting issue of consensus [Husham Ahmed (Pakistan)]; four inter-related paragraphs in Annex I [Husham Ahmed (Pakistan)]; rules of procedure [Daisuke Namioka (Japan), Husham Ahmed (Pakistan), Talgat Ashetov (Kazakhstan)]; and three points relating to the international cooperation and assistance (ICA) mechanism – mechanism machinery, the ICA Fund and cost-sharing [Thomas Fetz (Canada), Hope Reyes (Philippines)].

The first of these to be acted on was the four Annex I paragraphs (5, 30, 36 and 45). The afternoon plenary was suspended for a considerable time while this work was carried out which resulted in a new text for each of these which was presented in plenary. Language was proposed to streamline the existing Article X database, the proposed Article VII database and the proposed online exchange platform into a unified portal. Set-up costs for these tools and the unified portal would be funded through voluntary

contributions, with the running costs covered by assessed contributions. The proposed texts were not discussed further so that delegates had a chance to think about these overnight.

Thematic discussion

As many of the issues where there were divergences expressed were raised in more than one of the Chair's workstreams these are probably best discussed thematically. The points highlighted here are only a selection of those raised overall.

Consensus in the science and technology (S&T) mechanism – there were some calls for consensus reports from the components of the S&T mechanism, although many of these accepted that there could be a 'some say this, some say that' report that included all of the divergent views of experts. There was recognition by some in the room that S&T determinations are not the same as political determinations, including by the Chair. Concerns were raised that specifying the process of reporting too tightly could hinder the work of the experts. This will be an aspect of the small group discussion on consensus.

Liaison with other multilateral bodies – delegates disagreed on whether to specifically list multilateral organizations (like the WHO) whose work is relevant to the BWC that the S&T mechanism might interact with. Arguments were expressed about avoiding duplication with other bodies while others highlighted there were common areas with other bodies that were relevant to the BWC. The limitations of any list that could never be exhaustive were highlighted. The relevant paragraph remains parked.

Role of future Review Conferences in relation to the S&T mechanism – although Review Conferences routinely examine processes established by earlier Conferences there were suggestions that this should be explicitly specified in the WG draft decision in relation to the two proposed mechanisms. Some delegates suggested that the Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) might have a role in reviewing the mechanisms which were countered by others. A point of divergence was whether each future Review Conference would actively renew the mechanisms by a decision in each five-year cycle or should the mechanisms continue until a Review Conference decides to terminate them? There are some tasks allocated to the President of a Review Conference which would apply inter-sessionally but it is unclear whether this should be responsibility of the President of the last Conference or the forthcoming one.

Role of Meetings of States Parties – there is a clear consensus that any collection of measures, including the two mechanisms, that might be agreed at the Tenth BWC Review Conference would include an annual MSP. However, the role and status of the MSP remains the subject of divergent views with some delegates wanting to limit the role of MSPs with others wishing to allocate oversight tasks which would include taking some decisions on the operation of the mechanisms and other inter-sessional processes. What if the Review Conference cannot reach consensus on one of the tasks allocated to it? Should the mechanisms be stalled for five years or should the next MSP be delegated with the task of trying to resolve this? This was the precedent set after the inability of the Eighth Review Conference (2016) to reach consensus on the inter-sessional programme of work – that Review Conference handed the task to the 2017 MSP which adopted the work programme for 2018-2020.

Temporary Working Groups (TWGs) – the creation of TWGs to examine specific topics has long been accepted as part of the S&T mechanism. As ever, the devil is in the detail. There was divergence expressed over whether TWGs should be established only by a Review Conference or by an MSP, with some states expressing concern that waiting during five-year Review Conference cycles would hinder the mechanism's ability to respond to events. There is provision for a TWG to be created by states parties through a written silence procedure [i.e., it goes ahead unless anyone raises an objection] if proposed by the Chair of the mechanism. However, if this was used, then who decides the financial arrangements?

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>.