

Wednesday 11th February 2026

The BWC Working Group: the second day of the Eighth Session

The second day of the Eighth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Tuesday morning with Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) in the Chair.

The day started with a return to the four inter-related paragraphs discussed on Monday. There were also discussions on paragraphs from the ‘confidence-building and transparency’ and ‘compliance and verification’ sections. Following the plenary, informal consultations were scheduled to be held in a small room from 20:00 to go on no more than two hours. As a country was holding a national reception at its mission during the early evening, special arrangements had to be made to allow delegates to re-enter the Palais des Nations after hours.

The official WG8 web page is at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79376/>.

The four inter-related paragraphs

Revised texts for these four paragraphs (5, 30, 36, and 45) from Annex I of the Chair’s text (document [BWC/WG/8/CRP.1/Rev.1](#)) had been circulated late on Monday afternoon which were the focus of discussion in plenary at the start of the morning. There were many points that had remained which had long-held significant divergences. For example, Russia has long wanted to make a clear differentiation between international cooperation and assistance (ICA) activities under Article X and preparation for humanitarian response to potential biological threats under Article VII; while the majority see the benefits accrued under the two articles as synergistic and are less worried about any overlap between them or activities that encompass both. Some delegations wanted the sorts of offers for assistance across the paragraphs to be listed while others wanted simpler text such as ‘deployable capabilities relevant to the Convention’ without providing a list. It was apparent that the long list was not seen as ideal but delegations that had spent political effort bringing forward offers and providing resources for them would have an acknowledgement of what they could bring. There were suggestions that such detail could be put in a footnote but this was countered with a suggestion that this could open up a ‘Pandora’s box’ of future footnote proposals.

The Chair asked Husham Ahmed (Pakistan) to continue coordinating a ‘small group’ on this which met for the rest of the morning with the plenary suspended. The coordinator reported back to the afternoon plenary with new text which he described as finding convergence without privileging specific initiatives and that there was a delicate balance within and across these paragraphs. The result was everyone could be ‘equally unhappy’. He expressed the opinion that introducing further edits or changes could upset this balance. Delegations will return to these paragraphs later.

Confidence-building and transparency

During the afternoon there were plenary discussions on a new paragraph to replace paragraphs 12 and 13 from Annex I of the Chair’s text regarding possible improvements to the BWC system of confidence-building measures (CBMs). Again, a question of whether

past proposals in this area should be listed was a focal point of divergence. There have been a number of proposals made in this area, many of which have been the subject of significant disagreements. When other paragraphs had been discussed that related to voluntary transparency measures, there had been strong opposition to listing proposals made in that area and some delegations indicated that either both areas should list proposals or neither should. No conclusions were reached on this paragraph.

Compliance and verification

The subject of verification has been perhaps the most contentious issue within the BWC over the last quarter century or so. There is a clear consensus that there should be an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on compliance and verification established by the Tenth BWC Review Conference to be held in 2027. Two paragraphs from Annex I were discussed in Plenary.

Paragraph 16 relates to measures that might be considered by the OEWG. The Chair's text repeated language agreed at the Ninth Review Conference (2022) that referred to 'possible legally-binding measures'. This wording had been chosen at the Review Conference to avoid prejudicing future considerations but its inclusion here prompted the same retort made in 2022 that there are no effective verification systems that are non-legally binding. Others have pointed out that, while an effective verification system would need a core of legally-binding provisions, these may be reinforced by additional provisions that perhaps do not have that status and so other provisions need exploring. After a number of amendments were put forward to this paragraph which were unresolved in plenary discussion, the Chair asked Bastiaan Blaauw (Netherlands) to consult with delegations in the plenary room during a brief suspension of the meeting to see if progress could be made. After these consultations, he reported back to the resumed plenary that the conclusion he had reached was that a return to the Chair's original paragraph was the best basis for future work.

Discussion then turned to paragraph 17 which referred to methods, procedures and techniques that could contribute to verification but the predominant discussion on this paragraph was on the scope of verification – a topic that has been characterised by a long-standing divergence of views. The USA proposed focusing verification specifically on Articles I and II of the Convention for the OEWG. This was met with resistance from many delegations who argued that verification should apply more widely. Some of this was from delegations who wanted to have Article X in verification arrangements (who use the phrase 'all provisions of the Convention' to include this). There were also interventions highlighting there were BWC Articles other than I and II that had negative obligations (i.e., the requirement NOT to do something) that were important to compliance. By the time the plenary finished there was no agreement on this paragraph.

The general purpose criterion – a background note

The concept underpinning the BWC is known as the 'general purpose criterion' – that everything relevant to the Convention is prohibited unless held for a permitted purpose, and in types and quantities consistent with that purpose. This means that prohibitions under the Convention apply to materials and technologies far beyond what would directly be considered a 'weapon'. The criterion is widely recognized by analysts as not only being key to understanding compliance, but also to understanding how compliance of negative obligations might be verified. However, it rarely gets mentioned directly at a diplomatic level. As many materials and technologies have potentials to be used for either peaceful or hostile purposes, getting implementation of the general purpose criterion correct is vital to ensure negative-obligation compliance measures do not hinder peaceful uses. The general purpose criterion ensures that the BWC prohibitions remain relevant regardless of future scientific and technological developments, and that the prohibitions cover yet-to-be-discovered pathogens and toxins that may be employed as weapons.

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>.