BioWeapons Prevention Project

report 2026-5

Friday 13th February 2026

Slow progress at the Eighth Session and some reflections on science advice

Thursday, the penultimate day of the Eighth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC), saw some progress, albeit slow. The Chair, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), was visibly frustrated at times by the difficulty of getting delegates to be flexible enough to reach agreement on paragraphs being discussed. The visibility of his frustration perhaps peaked when the Russian delegation suggested that this was simply a 'first reading' of the text – a perspective the Chair firmly rejected.

The day started with the Chair announcing a new version of the draft decision was being circulated with the document symbol BWC/WG/8/CRP.1/Rev.2. The BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) have indicated this will be posted to the official web page of the Eighth Session which at https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79376/.

While the day was mostly focused on the Science and Technology (S&T) Advisory Mechanism there was agreement on some procedural paragraphs and, more significantly, adoption *ad referendum* of the four inter-related paragraphs.

The 2026 Youth for Biosecurity Fellowship programme can be found at https://www.disarmamenteducation.org/#/en/resources/type-41/project/764.

The four inter-related paragraphs

The coordinator of the small group looking at these, Husham Ahmed (Pakistan), reported back on progress made on paragraphs 5, 30, 36, and 45 from Annex I of Rev.1 of the Chair's text. There had been some minor editorial changes including some cross references to bring greater clarity. The four paragraphs were taken as a package and adopted. Owing to other changes to the text, paragraph 30 is now numbered 29.

The Science and Technology (S&T) Advisory Mechanism

The morning had started with the Chair indicating that the informal consultations the evening before had been 'not very useful' and had made 'limited progress' with only a few paragraphs highlighted in yellow. These ended up being discussed at some length.

In plenary, much of the discussion on Thursday was on the Reporting Committee (the smaller body). A key decision was that the Reporting Committee should be 'up to 25' members. However, arrangements for appointing the membership of this body remains under discussion. A two-level process seems to be gaining support, in which a list of members-elect is compiled by the chair of the mechanism in consultation with states parties to be adopted as a package by the Review Conference. The members-elect are drawn from nominations put forward by states parties.

The initial reactions have been positive but delegations asked for time to digest the suggestion and its implications. There are indeed some particular implications of this approach. The first is that the invitation to states parties to nominate candidates needs to be made well before the Review Conference. The second is that the chair of the mechanism needs to be appointed before the Review Conference; otherwise the list of members-elect cannot be compiled. The third is that if the mechanism can only be established by a Review Conference, by what means can the chair of the mechanism be

appointed beforehand if the mechanism itself at that moment does not exist? The case for there being a one-off arrangement for the initial establishment of the mechanism appears to be strong. This is before taking into account that many delegations advocate for the membership of the Reporting Committee to be drawn from the membership of the Review Group which means the larger body also needs to be established early.

The need for independence of experts involved in the S&T advisory process was emphasised by many delegations. The challenges of achieving this was the focus of some interventions. This was one of the points upon which it was clear that many delegates taking the floor had no direct experience of processes of science advice.

The issue of replacement of members unable to continue their work in the Reporting Committee was discussed with two options on the table: that the state party can replace them with someone else or that the mechanism chair should appoint a replacement. The first of these has overtones of the experts being the representatives of governments and so many delegations prefer the later. However, details of this process still need to be fleshed out such as how the mechanism chair might consult with states parties on this.

There was much discussion on the reporting from the mechanism. There are many examples in the Chair's draft where one element or other of the mechanism is required to produce a report or a review of some sort. Some interventions suggested that there may be too many reports required. Various terminology has been used within the discussions to describe different kinds of reports, such as 'substantive' or 'factual'. No clear distinctions were offered between these but from the context of comments it would seem that those using these terms were envisaging a 'substantive report' as being one that includes conclusions and recommendations while a 'factual report' would be a shorter summary of discussions that included the differing views expressed. From what has been said in plenary and in the corridors, there remains a gap in perception of how outputs of the S&T mechanism would be used in policy processes and thus what are the most useful form of outputs from the mechanism.

Many delegations have pressed for language on aiming for equitable geographical and gender representation in the S&T mechanism. The USA has wanted to strike out any references to this.

Some reflections on the proposed S&T mechanism

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report as objectively as possible. The following are some personal reflections that do not necessarily represent anyone's views other than the author's own.

Those without direct experience of using scientific inputs into policy making often have a linear view of how science advice operates – a question is posed to experts who produce advice which policy makers can then act upon. The real world, unfortunately, is rather messy. What comes out of the advice can be very influenced by the way the question is posed. There may be contextual information that those who pose the questions are not aware of but the experts are – an inability of the experts to convey this information to the policy community can easily lead to failure of the overall process. This is just one example of how being too prescriptive at this stage about reporting processes could lead to a reporting style from the mechanism that is less than optimum. This would have impacts across the Convention, not just on the international security aspects but also on international cooperation and assistance under Article X.

The UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) produced a four-page briefing 'Science in Policy' two decades ago that delegates might find informative (https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/post/pn196.pdf).

Rather than look at the experience of one country, delegates may get useful results from engaging with colleagues about what scientific advice has best provided inputs into their national policy processes in recent times.

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>.