

Friday 27th February 2026

The closure of the Eighth Session and some reflections

For those of a superstitious inclination, it is never good to have a meeting conclude on Friday 13th. In the event, there was no particular bad luck on the day, but simply a continuation of the decades-long misfortune that has left the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) as an international treaty that has not yet had the chance to make better use of its potential.

The final day of the Eighth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the BWC saw modest progress and the adoption of a procedural report. The day ended with the Chair, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), circulating a new version of the draft decision (BWC/WG/8/CRP.1/Rev.3). This and other documents from WG8 can be found on the official web page of the Eighth Session at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79376/>.

WG8 also marked the departure of Leandro Antunes Mariosi who is moving on to another diplomatic posting. Leandro has assisted Ambassador Meyer since he had become WG Chair and the Ambassador gave a heartfelt appreciation of his efforts.

The substantive discussions

The day started with further discussions on the operation of the Science and Technology (S&T) Advisory Mechanism. How to create Temporary Working Groups (TWGs) remained an area of disagreement with the roles of silence procedures and the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP) being core to this. There were also divergent views on how outputs from the TWGs should be handled. There were discussions without conclusions on how to guarantee the independence of experts within the mechanism and whether it should be specified that meetings should be in-person *vs* virtual. Benefits of in-person meetings were highlighted, but also the ability to hold more virtual meetings at a low cost. The question was posed as to what would happen if there was a future health emergency like the pandemic that reduced travel opportunities.

The meeting moved to discuss elements relating to the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) Mechanism. These included whether states parties who contributed above 10 per cent of the annual target (or 20 per cent for entities not states parties) would have observer rights in the ICA Steering Group. The discussions centred around whether this gave too much influence to funders or whether without this there would be insufficient confidence for funders who then might be less willing to donate. As donors would be observers, Russia raised its on-going objections to the rights of observers to address BWC meetings. On cost-sharing, the Chair asked Anmol Sher Singh Bedi (India) to confer with delegations to try to find a text that would allow agreement. The relevant paragraph was then adopted.

There was a cross-cutting discussion on the role of consensus in the future BWC mechanisms which also encompassed the role and function of the MSP and issues of verification. There remains the core disagreement over whether the MSP should be empowered to take administrative and substantive decisions to keep the BWC up to date or if such powers should remain solely with the Review Conference. There were strong

views expressed that multilateralism was underpinned by consensus actions. Concerns were raised that the traditional operation of consensus essentially provides a veto power to individual states to stop things moving forward. On verification, views remain split on whether all verification measures must be legally binding or whether a mixture of legally binding and non-legally binding measures might have merit.

In drawing the substantive discussions in the Eighth Session to a close, the Chair noted that on Monday roughly 60 per cent of the text had been in yellow or green and that this had risen to 75 per cent by the end of WG8 but noted that what was left ‘may be the most difficult parts’. Earlier in the day he had emphasised that much of what was left were not matters for clarification but issues that reflect political choices – ‘If we are unable to bridge them, the consequence is straightforward’.

There will be a number of informal consultations held before WG9 convenes in August with the Chair indicating monthly informal meetings would be useful to maintain momentum. It was also noted that many delegates will be involved with the Review Conference for the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) scheduled for 27 April to 22 May which is likely to take up a lot of working time.

Some 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.

When the WG was established by the Ninth BWC Review Conference (2022) it was allocated 15 days a year for substantive discussions for 4 years. The end of WG8 marks the completion of 50 days out of the 60-day total.

This last report from WG8 was nearly entitled: ‘The Eighth Session – arguing over phrasing while biothreats develop’. It would have possibly suggested to many readers a more pessimistic perspective than the reality; yet that draft headline embodies an underlying truth. There are significant challenges in this field and progress in international solutions is being held up by just a few delegations. Part of this comes across as being the inertia of past positions. There is much that has changed in the world, and in particular within BWC processes, that means there are opportunities here that can benefit all states parties.

When writing a piece like this, any author should challenge themselves to double-check whether it is fair to say the process is being held up by just a few delegations. It is clear that the vast majority of delegates this author has spoken with are in support of the overall package. No one expressed the view that the balance of measures is predominantly in their favour and everyone could point out something they wouldn’t have included in the draft decision that they would accept as part of a consensus agreement. As has been said so many times during the WG, consensus isn’t about finding something everyone is happy about, it is about finding something everyone can live with.

A noticeable feature of WG8 was the impact that routine rotations for postings can have on understandings of policies. Before the Ninth Review Conference, considerable effort had been put in by a number of people and organizations to help diplomats and officials become familiar with how S&T advisory processes work. Three years after the Review Conference, there was perhaps only a handful of people in the room behind country flags who had gone through that experience. This lack of experience of overlap of diplomacy and S&T advice was palpable in some interventions.

There were fewer ‘Meyerisms’ during WG8. He did, however, muse on whether the lack of compromise was because the UN authorities had not given compromise an identity badge – ‘That’s why it doesn’t get into the room, apparently’.

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>.