

Monday 17th August 2026

The Ninth Session of the BWC Working Group: setting the scene

The Ninth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) convenes in Geneva 17-21 August 2026. The WG Chair is Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) with Ambassador Anne Lazar-Sury (France) and Irakli Jgenti (Georgia) as Vice-Chairs.

The WG was established by the Ninth five-yearly BWC Review Conference (2022) to examine measures under seven specific topics listed in paragraph 8 of part II of its final report. These are: (a) international cooperation and assistance (ICA) under Article X; (b) scientific and technological (S&T) developments relevant to the BWC; (c) confidence-building and transparency; (d) compliance and verification; (e) national implementation of the Convention; (f) assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII; and (g) organizational, institutional and financial arrangements. The Review Conference also proposed two mechanisms should be established – on S&T review and on ICA/Article X – with the relevant paragraphs (paragraphs 18 and 19 respectively) including the wording: ‘In order for this mechanism to be established, the Working Group on the strengthening of the Convention will make appropriate recommendations.’

The WG is to report to the Tenth Review Conference which is due to be held in 2027 during dates yet to be decided. This means there are only 10 working days left in this four-year process which has already had 50 working days on substantive issues and 2 on administrative arrangements as well as numerous informal consultations. This session of the WG had been meant initially to be two weeks long but this was changed in December 2025 when it was decided to hold a session in February this year. As the number of working days available during 2026 had already been set, the working days for the meeting in February were taken from the proposed working days in August. WG10 is scheduled for 7-11 December to be followed by the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP) on 14-16 December. The dates for the Review Conference will be decided by the MSP and the coming months will be time to reflect on how the draft report from the WG will feed into the Review Conference and what might be expected to result from it.

Proceedings for public meetings will be video streamed via UN WebTV at <https://media.un.org/en/webtv/> and audio streamed via Listen Live at <https://listen-live.unog.ch/en/index.html>

Official documents and other materials, including details of side events, are being posted by the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to the official web page of the Ninth Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79378/>. One working paper has so far been submitted to WG9 – this was by Iran on ‘Prohibition of Attacks on Peaceful Medical and Biological Facilities’.

The Working Group in context

The BWC has often been described as a weak Convention because it lacks an institutional structure and formal verification arrangements amongst other things. While it does lack those things, there has been an underlying success in that biological weapons did not become widespread in the way that many commentators have feared over the past half-century. The BWC has had a major part to play in this success. Nonetheless, as with all

international instruments, the Convention is a construct of its history – reflecting the concerns uppermost in the minds of its negotiators in the contexts they were operating in at the time of negotiation. In the half-century of the Convention being in force, the S&T context has changed fundamentally which has not only changed the threat landscape but has brought forth many new ways in which the life sciences can benefit humankind. The need for additional measures within the BWC is clear. The agreement on the WG mandate marked a significant step forward in the potential to strengthen the Convention after previous inconclusive processes; the most notable of which had been negotiations for a legally-binding protocol to strengthen the BWC which had started in the 1990s and which were brought to a halt in 2001.

The WG operates by consensus. Consensus means it is rare for delegations to get all that they want, but as long as every delegation regards the positives in a negotiation as outweighing the negatives a consensus agreement can be achieved. The vast majority of delegations in the WG have indicated positions of broad support for the direction the discussions on the draft report are going. Two delegations have raised objections in recent WG sessions, those of Iran and of Russia. These two countries met at Ministerial level a week before WG9 and the communique from that meeting noted the two countries would cooperate more fully in a range of forums with the BWC specifically mentioned.

The draft report for adoption by the Working Group

The Chair has continued to work on a draft report for adoption by the WG which has been circulated in a number of iterations as the document has developed. The draft report reflects the decisions expected to be taken by the WG. The first collated version was a ‘rolling text’ circulated during WG6 that was based on the work done by the Friends of the Chair (FoCs) on the different issue areas being dealt with by the WG. Versions of the draft report have been discussed at WG7 and WG8 as well as being the subject of numerous informal consultations meaning that the process has had the widest possible range of inputs. A major step change was the preparation of a multi-coloured version of the draft report coming out of WG7. The text agreed in formal settings is highlighted in green and text agreed during informal consultations held between formal settings is highlighted in yellow. Text yet to be agreed remains unhighlighted. There are some proposals by delegations that have not been agreed upon and these are indicated using square brackets in unhighlighted text. Just as there had been many consultations in the time between WG7 and WG8, the Chair has held informal discussions open to all delegations at roughly monthly intervals between WG8 and WG9.

Ten days before WG9, the Chair distributed a new version of the draft report bearing the symbol [BWC/WG/9/CRP.1/Rev.1](#) which followed up on an earlier version circulated in April. The new version has a considerable quantity of yellow-highlighted text. As in WG8, it is expected that the Chair will prioritize converting yellow text to green in the plenary sessions at WG9 to ‘lock in’ the progress made before moving on to other areas. It is worth noting that the green-highlighted paragraphs are agreed *ad referendum* – a routine diplomatic procedure in which individual parts of a document can be agreed to with the assumption that the whole document will be agreed upon later. If the whole document is not agreed upon, states parties have no obligation to keep to their positions on earlier agreement of the individual parts. [Note: although the draft report has what looks like a formal document number, conference room papers (CRPs) are not usually posted on the UN documents server (<https://documents.un.org/>) and so drafts need to be downloaded from the WG9 website listed above. The various drafts are also linked from this NGO page focused on the WG: <https://shib-temp.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-wg/>.]

The majority of the latest version of the draft report is coloured green or yellow, although there are issues remaining which will be challenging. If the political will is there across all delegations, agreement is achievable.

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Tuesday 18th August 2026

WG9 - a stuttering start converting yellow text to green text

The Ninth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) was opened on Monday morning in the Assembly Hall at the Palais des Nations with Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) in the Chair. There were few formalities needed to open the session and these were carried out promptly.

Challenges arose in the conversion of text in the draft report from being highlighted in yellow (agreed in an informal setting) to highlighted in green (agreed in formal proceedings).

In his opening remarks, the Chair noted that the context the Convention operated in was rapidly changing and highlighted recent reports on the use of artificial intelligence to design new viruses not previously seen in nature. 'This demonstrates that the convergence of AI and biology is creating new security challenges, while also opening important opportunities for scientific and medical progress'. He went on to say: 'a gap may emerge between these rapidly advancing capabilities and our collective ability to understand their governance and prevent their misuse. Closing that gap is precisely why our work here matters'. Stressing that time was limited, with only 10 available working days, he urged delegations that had difficulty with any form of words in the draft report to propose 'clear and concrete alternative wording' in order to 'maintain a steady negotiation rhythm and avoid losing time that we do not have'.

The Chair informed the plenary that the WG may have to identify means by which elements of the decisions adopted in its final report could be immediately implemented by the Tenth Review Conference to be held next year rather than initiating a process that would then have to wait for the Eleventh Review Conference (2032) to be able to actually implement them.

Before starting the process of turning yellow to green, the Chair informed the WG that he would set two issue areas aside to allow other aspects of the negotiations to move forward. Both were areas where considerable divergences of perspectives have become apparent. The first of these related to the role of consensus in activities set up by the decisions taken by the WG, while the second was related to the role of the annual Meeting of State Parties (MSP). For example, there are divergences about whether the MSP should take on some functions or whether it would be better for other processes to steer elements of what would be established by the decisions taken by the WG.

During his opening remarks, the Chair had noted that 33 experts from developing states parties were present at the session under the sponsorship programme operated by the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) with financial support from Canada, France, Kazakhstan, the Philippines and the UK as well as the EU.

Converting yellow to green

In earlier WG sessions, the formal adoption in plenary of the yellow-highlighted text agreed in informal settings – and thus conversion to green-highlighted in the draft report – had been a relatively smooth experience. This was not the case on the opening day of WG9. The very first paragraph highlighted in yellow was the subject of a suggestion from

the floor that it not be turned green. This then happened to a proportion of paragraphs with yellow text, to the visible frustration of the Chair. Ambassador Meyer made many comments to a number of delegations asking why they had been able to agree to particular texts in the informal consultations but then been unable to agree to the same texts in plenary – what was the purpose, therefore, of sending delegates to informal consultations? He suggested that diplomats are supposed to find solutions: ‘We are paid to find language that can be accepted for everybody’.

On the first read-through, the majority of paragraphs were converted to green. A second read-through was then started in which delegations could provide more detail on their concerns. Here are a few examples, in the order they were raised, some of which were not in yellow text itself but in phrasing adjacent to yellow text in the same paragraph.

On verification matters, questions around ‘legally-binding’ were raised by the USA. India suggested including text on any verification arrangement(s) being implemented in an ‘equal and non-discriminatory manner for all states parties’.

On ICA trust fund/donor issues, the Netherlands pressed their position on the need for donors outside of states parties, such as the EU, and that if the EU could not be a source of funding it was unlikely that the Netherlands would provide a bilateral contribution. India noted that discussion of the trust fund had started with it being funded from assessed contributions and, in the process of trying to gain consensus, had been moved to being funded through voluntary contributions; there had to be a balance between a need to attract donors with a need for consideration of sources of funding.

On the Tianjin biosecurity guidelines, the USA proposed deleting the sentence containing the reference to these. Russia suggested they were tangentially opposed to the US position. Iran proposed the WG should ‘take note’ of the guidelines instead of ‘acknowledge’ them. China highlighted that earlier text used ‘endorse’ with regard to the guidelines and that ‘acknowledge’ would be as far as they could go.

On confidence-building measures (CBMs), there was some discussion on handling of proposals for updating or adding to the current system with Russia pressing for language that proposals already made (such as the one they have put forward on overseas military laboratories) should be considered.

At the start of the afternoon, the plenary was adjourned to allow for a small-group discussion on the remaining yellow text. According to one delegate, this was the most packed small-group meeting in their experience. Little was achieved in this meeting and the Chair resumed the plenary briefly, describing himself as ‘really disappointed’, before adjourning the plenary early with the words ‘I think that everybody should go home, think about if they want to be serious and go on with the work’.

Some initial impressions

With what has been written above it is hard not to conclude that the circumstances are challenging. It has been clear for some months that time is limited to complete all of the work to have a final report. Perhaps what is needed is a shock to the system?

A number of the former Friends of the Chair remain in Geneva and perhaps they could play a role, if the Chair requested them, to help bring some issues to a consensus conclusion.

It was hard to get a sense of the perspectives across the whole meeting on Monday as not many delegations had taken the floor and it was only possible to have discussions with a slightly random selection of delegates during the day with a number of them clearly cautious about saying much at such a sensitive time. One common theme across the regions was an expressed need for concessions by other delegations – perhaps inevitable at this stage in negotiations. There seemed to be no clear shared sense of what might constitute progress over the next few days, with many delegates indicating they felt they had conceded on a number of points to get to this stage.

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Wednesday 19th August 2026

Picking up pace at the Ninth Session of the BWC Working Group

Tuesday, the second day of the Ninth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC), saw significant picking up of the pace of negotiation on the draft report. However, there is still much to be done to meet the December deadline for completion of the work of the WG.

At the beginning of the morning, hard copies of CRP.1/Rev.2 were distributed, having been circulated electronically to delegates the night before. At the end of the day, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) indicated that a Rev.3 version would be made available to delegates overnight.

Start of the meeting

Opening the meeting for the day, the Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), noted that a calculation had been made that 90.6 per cent of the text of the final report was now green-highlighted.

The Chair added unilateral coercive measures (UCMs, essentially economic and trade sanctions) to his list of topics not to be discussed in plenary for now but to be set aside for later discussion, alongside the role of consensus and the role of the annual Meeting of State Parties (MSP). However, the Chair asked India to consult on UCMs and that delegation produced some draft language at the end of the working day for consideration by delegations overnight.

The Chair asked the plenary whether any delegation had any paragraphs they would like to work on during the morning. There was no specific suggestion offered initially. Iran suggested the focus should be on unhighlighted text. France suggested four issue clusters that paragraphs might be grouped in to aid discussion. Niger suggested that perhaps unhighlighted text adjacent to yellow-highlighted text could be a starting point and then suggested a specific area to do that would be in Annex II on the decision to establish a mechanism to facilitate international cooperation and assistance – the ICA mechanism. The Chair took up this suggestion and much of the day was spent on remaining paragraphs regarding the two mechanisms.

Run-through of the texts for both mechanisms

One of the first elements discussed for the ICA mechanism revealed one of the ambiguities of a word in English – ‘biannual’. This is known as a ‘contranym’ – a word that has two meanings, one of which means the opposite of the other. Its usage can mean twice a year or once every two years. In recent times, the term biennial has become common usage to mean once every two years to avoid this ambiguity. The Seventh BWC Review Conference (2011) encouraged states parties ‘to provide at least biannually appropriate information’ on their implementation of Article X. This encouragement was repeated at the Eighth Review Conference (2016). But which meaning of biannual was meant? Those who had been at the Conferences knew the intention was every other year, as was borne out by practice as recorded in an ISU document from 2018 – [BWC/MSP/2018/MX.1/2](#). As delegations checked copies of the documents from the

Review Conferences in the six official languages it emerged that the English-language version was the only one with the ambiguity – the others all refer to every other year. Language was found to reflect what was meant by the Review Conferences.

Proposals to reorder some paragraphs were made and accepted; mostly to ensure that the decisions on the two proposed mechanisms mirror each other – an indicator of the political perceptions of the connections between the two.

The issue of transfer controls has been one of the most difficult over the years with exporting countries wanting to retain sovereign control over transfer decisions and importing countries wanting to counter transfer denials. There are strongly held divergent views in this area and the exchanges in plenary did not provide much guidance about where a consensus sweet spot might lie. The Chair asked Australia, Cuba and the Netherlands to consult to see if a new text on this could be devised.

On trust fund/donor issues, the USA objected to removing square brackets around language allowing provision of financial resources from sources that are not states parties. All other interventions in the plenary were in favour of a wider pool of donors. The Chair asked if the USA and Canada could consult to find language that might achieve consensus. This is the second day that this issue has arisen and the USA has not been clear as to its concerns in this area which appear to indicate a change of national policy.

On the composition of the ICA Steering Group – the small body intended to oversee the operation of the mechanism – the role of donors remained an issue. Points were raised about keeping the meetings efficient. There was discussion about the ability to put in written submissions to the Steering Group rather than a right for oral interventions. The Chair asked if France and Sweden, which had taken differing positions, could consult to find new language. India then suggested that perhaps non-state party donors could participate in the ICA Advisory Group – the wider body in the mechanism – as this would help keep the Steering Group small. The Chair then asked if India could join the other two delegations in finding new text.

The run through of the remaining paragraphs on the science and technology (S&T) advisory mechanism was relatively brief.

On the selection of experts, there remains bracketed text on geographical and gender issues. Niger proposed that the text should refer to ‘geographical representation’ rather than ‘geographical distribution’ and this was supported by many interventions. Niger later clarified that its full amendment included ‘reflecting’ rather than ‘with due reflection of’ equitable geographical representation as this would be an actual outcome rather than an aspirational position. The USA was the only delegation not to join a consensus on resolving the bracketed text.

The reporting schedule within the S&T mechanism remains unresolved with some delegations pressing for timely annual reports for consideration by states parties (possibly via the MSP, but this was not discussed in plenary) and others wanting the five-yearly Review Conference being the body that considers any reports.

The need for S&T experts to be acting as individuals in their own capacity has long been agreed. A paragraph discussed was about declarations of conflicts of interest. The question was raised of what might be done if someone did not declare a conflict of interest or other matter that might raise a question about impartiality. Concerns were raised that without any sanctions to deal with an inappropriate declaration this might be a toothless exercise. Moreover, in the case of a situation where undeclared conflicts of interest arose, should the nominating state party be considered at fault? These questions remained unresolved. [*Editorial note: as an independent expert on various advisory committees over the years, the current author has had to make declarations regarding conflicts of interest. An inaccurate or incomplete declaration could lead to significant reputational harm that might jeopardise future roles and future funding. This means the process is taken seriously by experts.*]

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Thursday 20th August 2026

A clustering of issues

Most of Wednesday saw consultations in small groups behind closed doors. There were areas within which these were making some progress, but which in other areas that have a more complicated set of issues to deal it is probably too early to tell.

Hard copies of the latest version of the draft decision were printed first thing in the morning for the use of people in the plenary room. The latest was Rev.3 which had been circulated electronically to delegates the night before to reflect the changes agreed during the day. The recent drafts have now been posted by the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) to the official web page of the Ninth Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79378/>.

The creation of issue clusters

The Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), announced at the start of the morning plenary that discussions would be starting in parallel informal groups (and so held behind closed doors) based around seven issue clusters. These clusters were generally welcomed, although some smaller delegations privately indicated that they did not have the capacity to follow everything going on – there are a number of delegations with just one person available most of the time. Five were active during Wednesday, with facilitators indicated in square brackets:

Cluster 1 – Unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) [India/Norway]

Cluster 2 – Confidence-building measures (CBMs) [Peru]

Cluster 3 – Compliance and verification [Netherlands]

Cluster 4 – ICA Trust Fund [Canada/South Africa]

Cluster 5 – Science and Technology (S&T) [Pakistan]

There were brief reports back to plenary at the start of the afternoon meeting and towards the end of the day. Clusters 2 and 3 did not report any specific outcome at this stage.

Cluster 1 reported that while some progress had been made it was too early to propose new language but that this might be available by the end of the day as consultations would continue after the plenary adjourned. The facilitator suggested there was ‘a very slim and a very narrow landing zone’ but it might be possible to reach it.

Cluster 4 produced some new text in relation to the paragraph on receiving contributions, but that this had not reached consensus. The proposal was to split the paragraph into two. On the paragraph relating to the ICA Steering Group, there were indications of some appetite to recast this paragraph from scratch to find a new formulation.

Cluster 5 had made progress on the paragraph on the S&T reporting schedule. One step was by adding a phrase so it reads ‘through the Review Group consistent with its terms of reference’ The terms of reference were amended so that Review Group would report annually to states parties and that the Review Conference would get a five-year compilation for its consideration. This meant these three paragraphs worked upon could be converted to green.

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Friday 21st August 2026

Some progress in clusters - but how much is enough?

As with the day before, the majority of Thursday was taken up with consultations on clusters of issues in small groups behind closed doors. There was progress in some clusters and some text from them agreed in plenary. Even where there was no specific outcome reported from a cluster at this stage there was some sense of at least a little progress. However, with only limited time available, there needs to be some reflection on how much progress is enough to keep to the timetable to complete the tasks given to the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). At the start of a very brief initial plenary, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), the Chair of the WG, reminded delegates that there were only seven working days left and that the stakes were high.

In what is becoming something of a daily ritual, hard copies of the latest version of the draft decision – Rev.4 – were printed first thing in the morning for the use of people in the plenary room. [As an aside, one delegate suggested to the current author that perhaps the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) should be supplied with paper of various colours so that delegates can easily distinguish between versions of the draft decision!] Copies of the drafts are available on the official web page of the Ninth Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79378/>.

There were three plenary opportunities for reporting from facilitators and discussion about progress during Thursday – the first was when the suspended morning plenary was resumed at 12.20; the second at the start of the afternoon plenary before it was suspended to return to the clusters; and the third when the afternoon plenary was resumed at 17.40.

At the end of the afternoon plenary, a draft of the procedural report of the Ninth Session was circulated to delegates. This is based on the texts of the procedural reports from earlier WG sessions.

Cluster 1 – Unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) [India/Norway]

Of all of the issues to be dealt with by the WG, this is probably the most challenging. This has been the issue area with perhaps the strongest-held divergent views which have been held for decades. For example, some importing countries want to be able to challenge denials of export licences while exporting countries want to retain sovereign rights to decide whether an export might contribute to the emergence of biological weapons. At each Review Conference there is considerable time spent focused on this set of issues. There has never been a text that pleases everyone. As the WG Chair has noted numerous times – consensus means a solution that nobody likes but everyone can live with.

India, as co-facilitator, introduced a proposal in relation to the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) Advisory Group, stressing that much of the text was language previously agreed at BWC Review Conferences or from the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. Delegates were urged to think about what was essential to their positions rather than what is desirable.

There were interventions from the floor as to whether Article X should be specifically referred to in this text or whether there should be general references to the

provisions of the Convention. It was noted that there was relevance to Article VII activities. Should the text refer to ‘purposes not prohibited under the Convention’ or to ‘peaceful uses’ – there were arguments made in support of each of these. There were also questions about how burdensome the suggested voluntary reporting proposals might be.

Cluster 2 – Confidence-building measures (CBMs) [Peru]

The facilitator informed the plenary that ‘slight progress’ had been made but there was no specific language proposal ready to put forward. The key challenge was described in terms of finding a balance between new proposals for CBMs and other transparency measures.

Cluster 3 – Compliance and verification [Netherlands]

The facilitator indicated that the challenges included what will be discussed in the proposed open-ended working group (OEWG) and whether any possible arrangements being discussed could be legally-binding. There were ideas being put forward in relation to this cluster that the facilitator suggested could be developed further but more time was needed before presenting them to plenary.

Cluster 4 – ICA Trust Fund [Canada/South Africa]

This cluster did not meet during Thursday and so did not report back to plenary.

Cluster 5 – Science and Technology (S&T) [Pakistan]

The facilitator introduced proposed changes to the paragraph on creating temporary working groups (TWGs) so that they ‘may be established for a specific time’. This paragraph is now all in green. There was some progress on the appointment of the ‘Bureau’ of the mechanism with this paragraph mostly now in green with two elements of bracketed text, one of which relates to the consensus issue which is being held back for the moment.

There will be a report covering the closing of the Ninth Session which will be produced sometime next week.



Here is a QR code to access the page where these reports (going back to 2006) are hosted. At the top of that page there is a link to subscribe to the email list for future reports. The address of the page is also written out in the paragraph below.

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Sunday 30th August 2026

The final day of the penultimate session and some reflections

The Ninth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) completed its work on Friday 21 August. Much of the time was spent in informal small groups on the issue clusters. WG9 adopted a brief procedural report, based on equivalents from earlier sessions.

Although the Rev.5 version of the draft report from the WG had been circulated on the night before, a new version, Rev.6, was circulated on Friday morning. The BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) circulated Rev.7 on Thursday 27 August which has all of the WG9 edits. Copies of the revisions of the draft report are available on the official web page of the Ninth Session at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79378/>.

In a notable intervention, Ambassador Leonardo Bencini (Italy) took the floor on his last working day in Geneva. He was President of the Ninth Review Conference (2022) that established the WG and described the Conference as ‘a collective achievement ... against all odds, against a background which was certainly not very favourable.’ He added, ‘the main goal that we achieved at the time was to break a 21-year-old deadlock. We decided to strengthen the institutionalization of the Convention and we put on the agenda again the issue of verification and in order to do that, we created this Working Group.’ Noting ‘huge progress’ and highlighting the importance of the two mechanisms ‘because it is the first step towards creating a more solid institutional framework for our Convention which it doesn’t have at the moment’, he expressed optimism that agreement could be reached in December. ‘But I would like to also sound a note of caution and warning – we have to be very careful; it is a very delicate moment. ... I remain optimistic, but if we don’t find an agreement, the whole process risks imploding. And what I mean by imploding, I mean all the work that we have conducted over the past few years and even before might have been in vain and we will go back to square one, which is not 2022, but it is 2021, because we are not going to repeat what we have done here. So there is a lot at stake. I don’t want to be negative, I just want everyone to be aware.’

Substantive discussions

As with Thursday, much of the time on Friday was spent in informal small groups on the issue clusters. The idea was that these informal settings could be used to discuss proposals, which if they gathered consensus could be brought forward through the facilitators to plenary for agreement. Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), the Chair of the WG, expressed frustration that while the clusters were working well there were times when delegations were bringing proposals to plenary rather than have them discussed first in the relevant cluster – a less productive use of time.

Cluster 1 – Unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) [India/Norway] – Proposals from the facilitators moved the discussions forward. A paragraph on ‘restrictions and/or limitations’ on transfers was agreed and so green-highlighted after it was recast so that it recalled understandings reached by earlier Review Conferences. One of the sub-paragraphs to this was greened while the other remained unagreed.

Cluster 2 – Confidence-building measures (CBMs) [Peru] – The facilitator introduced text to try to balance proposals for CBM changes with proposals for voluntary

measures. At lunchtime, Iran and the USA asked for more time to consider the proposal, leading the Chair to comment: 'These meetings are funny because we can have agreement between USA and Iran'. An updated paragraph was agreed in the afternoon making this whole section now green-highlighted.

Cluster 3 – Compliance and verification [Netherlands] – The facilitator introduced new text for some of the remaining sub-paragraphs on what verification discussions might cover. The compromise drew from language in Article I of the Convention about prohibitions. Almost all of the sub-paragraphs are now in green.

Cluster 4 – ICA Trust Fund [Canada/South Africa] – Did not report anything specific on Friday, but indicated, as other facilitators had done, that they would continue consultations between now and WG10 in December.

Cluster 5 – Science and Technology [Pakistan] – The facilitator introduced text on the overarching paragraph relating to topics to be discussed by Review Group allowing this paragraph to be green-highlighted. New language for three paragraphs on the composition of the Reporting Committee were put forward. This included provisions for replacements appointed when there are mid-session vacancies in the Committee which included a reference to the states parties meeting 'informally' to decide on the replacement in order not to incur costs for a formal meeting. These were also agreed.

Some reflections on the Ninth Session of the Working Group

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report as objectively as possible. However, this style of reporting does not always 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.

There is not much time left before the mandate of the WG comes to an end. While there will be time for some informal consultations before the Tenth Session convenes in December, there are only five working days left before the WG mandate expires. Even though the vast majority of text is now green-highlighted (the ISU's calculation is 93.5 per cent in green and yellow), this is a tight schedule. Yet it must not be forgotten that final compromises only occur when the schedule is very tight. There have been numerous cases where many issues have been resolved when deadlines loom. Equally, there have been cases where negotiations failed because there was too much to do in too little time in the final days. As Ambassador Bencini noted, there is a lot at stake.

The consequences of a 'failure' of WG9 need to be considered carefully. It is hard to see what could come out of the Tenth Review Conference (2027) as many states parties would not wish to allocate four more years of resources to any process that might not be productive. There already murmurings (from individual delegates rather than delegations as a whole) of whether a different forum might be better used to strengthen global efforts to control biological weapons. The 1925 Geneva Protocol (which bans use of biological weapons) would be an obvious choice as issues around investigation of alleged uses and science advice that might facilitate such investigations would fall within its remit. There is no equivalent to BWC Article X in the Geneva Protocol and so the question of balancing details of two mechanisms would not arise.

The tone of WG9 has been dictated in part by its position in the timeline. Gone are conceptual discussions in earlier sessions on the role of science advice or the impact of enhanced international cooperation and assistance; these have been replaced by much more legalistic discussions of formulating text. It might be productive to remind delegates in the run-up to WG10 of some of the concepts underpinning the work of the WG.

Meeting in the Assembly Hall, the largest conference room in the Palais des Nations, came with challenges owing to the physical size of the room. However, the availability of a number of small meeting rooms one floor below made the cluster process more effective than it would have been in recent WG sessions held in the Tempus building – a temporary structure used while other conference rooms are being refurbished.

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>.