

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.

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>.