

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.

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>.