

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.*]

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>.