

CWC CSP-24 Report

The second day: continuation of the general debate

Tuesday, the second day of the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of States Parties (CSP) for the Chemical Weapons Convention, was spent almost entirely on further statements made in plenary session as part of the general debate.

Before the resumption of the general debate, the CSP heard from Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who noted that the OPCW Director-General had briefed the Security Council on the work of the Organization earlier in the month. She underscored that the UN Secretary-General had “full confidence in the professionalism, objectivity and impartiality of the work of the OPCW”. She remarked that the work towards a chemical-weapon-free world was far from complete and emphasised “the international norm against chemical weapons has been repeatedly challenged by their use, with impunity, in the Syrian Arab Republic” and that it “remains imperative to ensure that those who use chemical weapons are identified and held accountable”. She made a plea to delegations to “engage in dialogue between each other and with the OPCW Secretariat to ensure the full implementation of all decisions adopted by Conferences of States Parties, including decision C-SS-4/DEC.3” (the June 2018 decision) and indicated that access to Syria should be granted to the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) “without restrictions or impediments to perform its mandate”.

Further themes from the general debate

The reporting here looks at further themes in the general debate following discussion in the previous daily report on: use of chemical weapons; schedule amendments; investigations of alleged use; gender balances; and destruction of chemical weapons. The delegations making statements in the general debate on Tuesday were: Bahrain, the Philippines, India, Uruguay, Colombia, New Zealand, Sweden, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Pakistan, Malta, Cuba, Panama, Brazil, Poland, Ukraine, Fiji, Syria, Malaysia, Switzerland, Japan, Argentina, Kenya, Bangladesh, Peru, Uganda, Myanmar, Bosnia Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Albania, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Norway, South Africa, Turkey and Algeria. At the end of the day the Chair of the CSP, Ambassador Krassimir Kostov (Bulgaria), read out a list of 25 further states parties that wished to make statements, meaning the general debate will take up a significant proportion of Wednesday. While the majority of the reporting here takes details from statements made on Tuesday, there is also reflection of some points made on Monday. Further themes will be discussed in coverage of the third day of the general debate and these will include aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals, the revitalized facilitation framework and the budget for 2020.

Myanmar – following the statement by the USA on Monday alleging that Myanmar had a past chemical weapons programme that had not been declared, Bangladesh noted it was “deeply concerned” about the allegations regarding its neighbour. Myanmar stated it was committed to implementation of the CWC, that it had never had any ambition to be a chemical weapons possessor and that it was willing to address any concerns in a constructive manner.

Investigations of alleged use – there was further discussion on the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in relation to an allegation of use in Douma, Syria, in April 2018. Syria suggested that the report was based on “distorted facts”. Others, for example, Sweden and Germany, expressed confidence in the FFM and its processes and procedures. Malaysia

referred to the unofficial release of a technical contribution to the FFM investigation as a breach of confidentiality that could undermine the OPCW. On the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) established following the June 2018 decision, Pakistan suggested that this decision had caused disruption in the balance between the Technical Secretariat and the Policy Making Organs in the OPCW.

Syria declaration assessment – since Syria became a state party to the CWC in 2013, there have been concerns about “gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies” in the declaration by that country regarding its chemical weapons programme. [Note: the phrase is the one used in Executive Council decision EC-81/DEC.4 adopted by consensus on 23 March 2016.] The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) was established to resolve these “gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies” and many delegations used their statements to urge the resolution of these, calling for more efforts to be made. In his statement on Monday, the Director-General informed the CSP that, to date, there had been 22 rounds of consultations between the Secretariat and the Syrian Government.

Underpinning the norm – a large number of delegations included some form of words to indicate that there were no circumstances in which use of chemical weapons could be justified – the norm that underpins the CWC. Australia reminded the CSP of the words in the Preamble to the CWC: “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, through the implementation of the provisions of this Convention”.

Universality – The aim of universal membership is an issue that is regularly raised within international treaties dealing with global challenges. For some, the breadth of the membership is a reflection of overall effectiveness. There were calls from Middle East states for Israel to become a state party (the country has signed the Convention but not ratified it). In the past there had been specific mentions of the other non-states parties – the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt and South Sudan – but most of the calls for universality at this CSP have been more general.

Article XI – The issue of access to peaceful uses of chemistry is covered by Article XI of the Convention, embodying a bargain that the renunciation of chemical weapons and the control of poisons as weapons has to be implemented in such a way as to facilitate the use of chemistry for peaceful purposes. There were many references to capacity building (not only under this article, but also capacity building under Article X on assistance and protection). The Philippines, for example, drew connections between capacity building and effective national implementation – not simply in the legal sense, but also by the bringing together of the many agencies in government that have to be involved. There were a number of links made with the Sustainable Development Goals. It was noted that capacity building could assist in promoting broader geographical representation of Designated Laboratories, as there is not one in either Africa or in Latin America, and this would be helped by the creation of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (see below). South Africa referred to its efforts to enhance its laboratory capacities through a twinning programme with the eventual aim of achieving Designated Laboratory proficiency standards.

OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology – many statements expressed support for the creation of a Centre for Chemistry and Technology, sometimes called the ChemTech Centre for short, by upgrading the current OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store. Aspects of the project highlighted in statements were the contribution it would provide to capacity-building activities and to enhanced capabilities for the OPCW to keep track of relevant scientific and technological developments. The Director-General had noted on Monday that EUR 28.6 million had been raised thus far and that a further EUR 5 million was required by July 2020. A number of countries made pledges during the general debate of further financial contributions to the project.

This is the third report from the Conference of States Parties (CSP) for the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague from 25 to 29 November 2019. These reports have been produced for all CWC Review Conferences since 2008 and CWC CSPs since 2018 and are written by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events for the CWC Coalition, a global network of non-governmental groups with an interest in the Convention. The reports, together with those from earlier meetings and an email subscription link, are available at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>>. The author can be contacted via <<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>>.