

# CWC Review Conference Report

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## Consensus confounded

The efforts to achieve consensus at Fifth Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention were crushed under the weight of the magnitude of the task.

The morning started with a return to issues that remained in play after the overnight discussions and continued with the of the Friends of the Chair and the informal group for the preparation of the report being steered by the Chair of the Committee of the Whole (CoW), Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia (Mexico). This informal group became known by some delegates as the ‘calf’ – a smaller creature spawned by a cow.

### **The morning plenary meetings**

There morning session included two brief plenary meetings. The first was a quick update on progress. The Chair of the Review Conference, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast (Netherlands), noted that there was ‘a lot of work going on’. In his role as Chair of the General Committee he gave a brief procedural report about the latter’s activities.

The second started with a brief update on procedure and the interactions that had taken place between the Chairs, the Vice-Chairs and the regional groups to allow delegates to understand the processes being followed. There was then an oral report from the Chair of the CoW who indicated that there had been progress on the following issue clusters: guidelines on NGO attendance, geographical diversity and tenure policy, industry verification, engagement with external stakeholders and contributions to global anti-terrorism efforts. He noted that there would be a focus on the cluster on threat of use of chemical weapons in the informal group during the rest of the morning and described himself as ‘reasonably optimistic’ that agreement could be reached on some of the key paragraphs. It is the cluster on threats which contains the language relating to Syria – the most challenging of all of the subjects under consideration.

### **The afternoon meetings of the CoW and the plenary**

Immediately after lunch, the CoW was convened behind closed doors in the main meeting room to take the procedural steps to forward the text resulting from the informal group to the plenary. Immediately following this, the plenary received an oral report from the Chair of the CoW who informed delegates that there were still ‘outstanding issues’ on which ‘fundamental divergence of views’ continue to exist and so it had been impossible to reach consensus.

The Chair of the Conference announced that the plenary would reconvene on Friday afternoon to adopt the report of the Conference which would reflect that no consensus could be found. The plenary was then adjourned.

The atmosphere in the room was one of surprise at the suddenness of the end of the process. Some delegates wandered around the room speculating whether anything could be done to retrieve the situation but it was clear that the challenges were too great.

***Please note there will be an additional report in this series which will cover the last day of the Review Conference and will be posted to the website below.***

*This is the fifth report from the Fifth Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague from 15 to 19 May 2023. These reports are written by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events who is solely responsible for their contents. The reports are available via <http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html> which includes a subscription link to receive the reports via email. The author can be contacted via [richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk).*