

Friday 8th August 2014

The fourth day: strengthening national implementation

The topic for discussion at the Meeting of Experts (MX) on Thursday was ‘Strengthening national implementation’.

At the opening of the day’s proceedings, the Chair, Ambassador Urs Schmid (Switzerland), outline the process for adoption of the report of the meeting. As in earlier years, the report would be in three parts: a procedural section, a list of documents submitted, and an annex containing the compilation of proposals and suggestions made during proceedings. The Chair circulated the first tranche of the annex containing proposals made on Monday and Tuesday allowing delegates to check their proposals have been reflected appropriately. A first draft of the procedural section was circulated in the afternoon.

Statements

The nominal sub-topics for the morning were: measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of the Convention, especially Articles III and IV; ways and means to enhance national implementation, sharing best practices and experiences; and regional and sub-regional cooperation. Statements/presentations were given by Iran (for the non-aligned), Chile, Iraq, Japan, Mexico, Spain, USA, Canada, Malaysia, Thailand, Mongolia, Russia, France, Netherlands, Australia, Switzerland, Cuba, Pakistan, India and Iran.

The afternoon session started with presentations from ‘Guests of the Meeting’ and international bodies then delegations. Statements/presentations were given by: the coordinator of the group of experts that supports the committee established by UN Security Council resolution 1540, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Japan, Germany, Russia, USA, UK, China, Pakistan and Iran (national). The nominal sub-topics for the afternoon were: national, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens and toxins; and any potential further relevant measures.

Where available, copies of statements/presentations will be posted on the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Themes

There was a clear acceptance that there was an obligation for national implementation under Article IV. There was a divergence of views about Article III, especially whether it should be linked with Article X, along the lines of divergences expressed on Tuesday.

A number of Working Papers were referred to, such one on a tool for evaluating facilities with biological agents, (WP.6, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Spain); one on export control systems, (WP.8, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Spain and the USA); and on effective national implementation (WP.11, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Thailand). The US also spoke to its response to the ‘We need to talk about compliance’ paper from 2012 (WP.10).

A number of delegations gave updates on national implementation status. Chile highlighted its efforts to promote dissemination of information relevant to the Convention within the country and that illustrated how the existing legislation was being reviewed such that specific legislation was being prepared for comprehensive implementation of the BWC. Iraq spoke of its committee arrangements to provide a comprehensive policy to deal with biological threats. Japan illustrated experiences from a recent inter-disciplinary meeting on biorisk management. Canada spoke about the Human Pathogens and Toxins Act. Malaysia informed the room that the Biological Weapons Bill that has been under consultation is now expected to be introduced to Parliament in 2015. Thailand said that a recent review of their Pathogens and Animal Toxins Act had led to a new draft being put to the Council of State this year. Australia noted its legal framework is outlined in its Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) return. Germany noted its laws to implement the BWC are in the ISU's national implementation database.

Some delegations emphasised the view that there should be a distinction between national implementation and compliance. Many delegations raised CBM issues. Some stressed the benefits of CBM-return preparation activities in helping governments bring together relevant agencies within a country to interact on BWC-relevant issues. Others were concerned that CBMs should not be used as a tool for compliance assessment of countries.

There were many calls for a legally binding verification instrument, with suggestions that this would provide the best benchmark by which national implementation could be considered. The Netherlands said it supported the idea of a verification instrument, but considered it not achievable in the current political circumstances. Switzerland proposed an idea of a 'legally binding compliance framework'. Cuba stressed that partial measures were no substitute for a comprehensive instrument. Russia reminded the MX of the details in its proposal for restarting negotiations on measures to strengthen the BWC through an additional instrument and stressed that these are just initial ideas.

Particular points

The USA spoke about its programme to assess reliability of personnel who handle dangerous biological agents; this presentation also gave an update on recent pathogen handling incidents and steps taken to rectify the situation. Russia raised the issue of reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol, calling for those that remain reserving the right to use prohibited weapons to be withdrawn. France spoke about its recent Peer Review exercise. India, one of the countries taking part in the exercise, said it was yet to be convinced by the concept but was not opposed to further discussion of it. Germany referred to a German Ethics Council (Deutscher Ethikrat) study relating to biosecurity and indicated a hope to hold a side event in December on the resulting report.

Side events

There was one side event on Thursday, at lunchtime, entitled 'Biosecurity Education: Towards an Integrated Approach' was convened by the University of Bradford, US National Academy of Sciences and Landau Network-Centro Volta. Presentations were given by Tatyana Novosiolova (Bradford), Alice Baldini (LNCV) [unable to attend, but presentation read out by another speaker], Jo Husbands (NAS), Roberta Ballabio (University of Insubria) and Maurizio Martellini (LNCV). The event was chaired by Judit Körömi (Hungary).

NOTE: There will be an additional MX report covering the final day of the Meeting. This will be published early next week and will be posted at the web location given below.

This is the fifth report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 4 to 8 August 2014 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

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