

Tuesday 11th August 2015

## The opening day: introductory statements and Article VII

The Chair of the 2015 Meeting of Experts (MX), Ambassador Mazlan Muhammad of Malaysia, opened the meeting on Monday morning, noting that this year was the fortieth anniversary of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC).

Formal decisions were taken, such as adoption of the agenda, programme of work and the rules of procedure. Guinea was admitted as an observer, together with a number of international bodies. Sponsorship had been provided by Australia, Finland and the Netherlands, via the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), to assist the participation of representatives of Burundi, Cameroon, Cuba, Mongolia, the Philippines and Sudan. Bilateral sponsorship by the USA to support the participation of Guinea was referred to later in the day. The morning was devoted to introductory statements with the afternoon to Article VII once statements were complete. Where copies of statements, presentations or posters are provided by those that gave them, these will be added to the ISU website.

### **Introductory statements**

Statements were made by Iran (for the non-aligned), Russia, Denmark, Bangladesh, USA, France, Pakistan, Malaysia, Brazil, Mexico, China, Italy, India, Cuba, Australia, Argentina, Ghana, and the Netherlands. A statement was also made by the European Union.

To save duplication, themes relating to subject areas that have dedicated sessions later this week, such as cooperation and assistance and national implementation, will be discussed in the reports for those days. Many references were made by delegations to working papers either already published or that were in preparation. A large number of statements called for increased membership of the BWC and welcomed Andorra which had joined the Convention this year as the 173<sup>rd</sup> State Party. Numerous references were made to the fundamental tension within the Convention – the dual-use dilemma that the life sciences could be applied to beneficial or malicious purposes and the challenges that arise in inhibiting the hostile uses while preserving, indeed encouraging, the peaceful uses.

While the recent Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa was of natural origin, many delegations recognised there were a number of lessons to be learned from the response efforts for Ebola that could apply to any future disease outbreak triggered by the use of biological weapons. Such lessons might be applied at the local, national and international levels and so were not limited to issues relating to Article VII.

There were numerous calls for a legally binding instrument to strengthen the BWC with other statements suggesting there was no consensus for this or what form it would take. Russia expanded upon its earlier suggestions for new methods of working to propose an open-ended arrangement to discuss possible ways of strengthening the Convention.

Cooperation across the traditional group lines that have existed within the Convention were mentioned, although some falls within definitions of capacity building.

Denmark referred to a project it was working on with Kenya to enhance biosecurity in East Africa. France and India spoke of their joint paper on a proposal for an Article VII database. Australia spoke of a forthcoming paper with Malaysia. China made reference to a project with France to help build China's first level-4 laboratory.

Calls were made to widen participation in the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) arrangements. A number of countries noted that they had submitted returns. Mexico noted that it had made its CBM return public for the first time. The Netherlands indicated that CBM submissions would be included in the Benelux peer review of the three countries' national implementation.

A number of references were made to preparations for the Eighth BWC Review Conference which is to be held in 2016. Some of the comments related to how the inter-sessional process might be made more productive, if a new one was established for the period 2017-2020. References were made to the 'delicate balance' outcome of the Seventh Review Conference in 2011.

Ghana observed that there was a low participation from African countries and suggested this could lead to lack of balance in the proceedings. New books on biosecurity issues were highlighted by Denmark and the Netherlands. The EU described elements of a new Council Decision to support the BWC that is in preparation.

### **NGO statements**

Non-governmental organizations addressed the meeting in an informal session. Statements were given by: the University of Bradford; the University of London; Biosecure; the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre and Ukrainian Biosafety Association; the International Network of Engineers and Scientists; the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; the BioWeapons Prevention Project; Research Group for Biological Arms Control, Hamburg; the Verification, Research Training and Information Centre; and Pax Christi International.

### **First working session – Article VII**

The afternoon session consisted of a panel composed of international organizations on the theme of 'surveying existing capacity'. Presentations were given by the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of the Red Cross, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Issues included within these presentations dealt with lessons from recent disease outbreaks (not only Ebola but also MERS and some influenza strains), the operation of relief activities in contaminated environments, preparations that can make assistance more effective in an emergency including lessons learned from experiences with past humanitarian relief operations, types of assistance that can be made from the various agencies and how these agencies operate with other bodies.

### **Side event and poster session**

There was one side event on Monday, hosted by Switzerland on 'Developments in Science & Technology relevant to the BWC'. Opening remarks were given by Ambassador Urs Schmid (Switzerland) with presentations by Katherine Bowman (US National Academies of Science), Christopher Timperley (OPCW Scientific Advisory Board), Gunnar Jeremias (University of Hamburg) and Piers Millett (Biosecure).

At the end of the day, a poster session on subjects relevant to the topics under discussion at the MX was held.

*This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 10 to 14 August 2015 in Geneva.*

*The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) and are available via the BWPP website at <[www.bwpp.org](http://www.bwpp.org)> The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>.*