

CWC Review Conference Report

The Second Day of the Conference: Further general debate

The Second five-yearly Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) continued on Tuesday. The whole day consisted of 'general debate', which offers the chance for states parties to make open statements. Where the delegation provides the OPCW with a written text, a copy is being placed on the website <<<http://www.opcw.org/rc2/>>>. By Tuesday night, four statements had been posted. Individual speeches were described, as they happened, by Daniel Feakes on his blog at <<<http://cwc2008.org>>>.

The morning session started with a statement by the United States, followed by Saudi Arabia, China, Russia, Singapore, Japan, Pakistan, Iran, Serbia, Switzerland, Mexico and Algeria. Just before the lunchtime break, there was a pointed comment from the Conference secretariat that many representatives were taking longer than the agreed time for their statements. After lunch, statements were heard from Canada, New Zealand, South Africa (national statement), Ukraine, Indonesia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Peru, Republic of Korea, Australia, Brazil, Tunisia, Yemen, Norway, Sudan, El Salvador and Mongolia.

Common themes

A number of themes emerged amongst the thirty statements given on Tuesday. This analysis also includes the five statements given on Monday and referred to in yesterday's *Report*. Further statements are expected to be given during Wednesday.

Universality – Seen as important, but few specifics offered on how to encourage 'difficult cases' to join. A few statements made reference to encouraging Israel to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a step to encourage regional uptake of the CWC.

Chemical weapons destruction – Many statements expressed the importance of the deadlines. The Cuba/NAM statement suggested this issue should be the 'primary focus' of the Review Conference. A large number congratulated Albania for completing its destruction. The possessor states tried to offer reassurance that all was being done to complete the task as soon as was practical. No statement disagreed with the idea of a special session closer to 2012 to examine destruction deadline issues. The Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Maxime Verhagen, representing the host country, expressed support for the idea.

Article XI – '[U]ndue restrictions' on the exchange of technology, materials and equipment for peaceful purposes 'are contrary to the letter and spirit' of the CWC, in the words of the Cuba/NAM statement. Similar language was used by a number of other states on this issue.

Industry verification – While little mention was made of inspections of facilities handling scheduled chemicals, the subject of 'Other Chemical Production Facilities' was raised a number of times. For example, the Slovenia/EU statement said 'the number of OCPF inspections should be increased where necessary' and 'verification resources should be used in accordance with the risk posed to the Convention'. Costs associated with verification were noted by others. Singapore urged the 'standardising' of declaration practices.

Threats from terrorism – Many statements noted the threat posed by terrorist access to toxic materials, although few connected it specifically with the issue of national implementation. However, capacity building through the CWC was seen as valuable.

National implementation – Some states made remarks about the Action Plan. Some made reference to specific measures they had introduced in their own countries. A few states specifically mentioned the benefits of incorporating the ‘General Purpose Criterion’ (GPC) into national implementing legislation. The GPC is the principle within the Convention that all toxic chemicals (and other artifacts associated with hostile uses of chemicals) are prohibited unless they are held for a permitted purpose, and in types and quantities consistent with that purpose.

Incapacitants/riot control agents – The issue was raised in a some statements, most simply noting the prohibition on riot control agents as a method of warfare. Switzerland ‘fears that the uncertainty concerning the status of incapacitating agents risks to undermine the Convention. A debate on this issue in the framework of the OPCW should no longer be postponed’. Referring specifically to riot-control agents, Iran deplored ‘the recent use of such non-lethal weapons as a means of warfare’ without giving details of what it was alleging.

Notable aspects

A few aspects of individual statements are worth noting. China stated that ‘not one piece’ of Japanese abandoned chemical weapons on its territory had been destroyed so far. Japan stated that destruction facilities would start operating in 2010 ‘if all goes smoothly’. The US statement contained a message from Ambassador Don Mahley, who will soon retire from government service having been involved with chemical weapons arms control since the CWC negotiations in the 1980s. The statements by both the United States and Iran were softer than many had expected. While numerous differences remain between the two countries, the language used on this occasion had some of the rougher edges taken off it. When significant disputes have happened at previous meetings related to the CWC – and of those related to the Biological Weapons Convention – the two countries have often been key players on each side of the disagreement.

National Papers

The first four national papers were published on Monday, all of which were from China. Additional papers are understood to have been submitted and are being prepared for publication. All of these are to be placed on the OPCW website <<<http://www.opcw.org>>> in due course. When space permits, a review of national papers will appear in a future *Report*.

NGO display

The Society for Chemical Weapons Victim Support (SCWVS), an Iranian NGO, has a display in the conference centre about the effects of chemical warfare in the 1980s relating to attacks on the Iranian military by Iraqi forces and attacks that took place on civilian areas. During Tuesday lunchtime, the Society guided conference participants around the display and answered questions. The display is a salutary reminder in two regards; firstly that the use of chemical weapons has long-lasting effects, and second that the severity of the consequences of not succeeding in controlling materials and technologies that could be used to make chemical weapons. Some of the SCWVS people who had travelled to The Hague had themselves been casualties of chemical warfare and there is a strong sense they feel there are forgotten victims of the conflicts of the time – for example, that attacks on the civilians of Halabja are remembered, but attacks on the civilians of Sardasht are not.

This is the third report from the Second Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention which is being held from 7 to 18 April 2008 in The Hague. These reports are designed to help people who are not in The Hague to follow the proceedings and are prepared by Richard Guthrie with financial support from the Ploughshares Fund <<<http://www.ploughshares.org>>>.

Copies of these reports (and details of how to subscribe to them by e-mail) are available on the CBW Events website at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>> and via the NGO resources page at <<<http://cwc2008.org>>>. Richard Guthrie can be contacted during the Review Conference on +31 620 901 205 or <<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>>.