

CWC Review Conference Report

The Fourth Day: Committee of the Whole convenes

The Second five-yearly Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) moved into a new phase on Thursday. The Committee of the Whole convened in the morning, with Ambassador Benchaâ Dani (Algeria) in the Chair, with the aim of starting on drafting the text of a final declaration. However, there didn't seem to be a clear agreement on what would be the best procedure to do this. What was agreed was that the final 'informal' text of the Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group preparing of the Review Conference would be the starting point for discussion. A further iteration of the informal text was circulated by Cuba on behalf of 'the NAM CWC States Parties and China' with suggested deletions and insertions of new language.

The committee met formally for only a short while before breaking into 'informal consultations' in a side room – considered a more flexible format than the rigidity of the main conference hall. However, the largest available side room did not have the capacity to contain all the delegates who wished to attend and so the consultations stretched out into the corridor. It was a peculiar sight to see normally peaceful diplomats jostling for position near the doorway.

A decision was taken that the informal text should be examined on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. As the consultations broke for lunch, after some two hours of discussion, paragraph 1 was not considered to have been fully examined, prompting some in the corridor to make rough calculations of how long the process might take to go through all 142 paragraphs of the draft text!

After lunch the informal consultations resumed, but this time in the Ieper Room in the OPCW Building (where the Open Forum had been held on Wednesday). The Ieper Room is the main meeting room in the building and is used for regular meetings of the Executive Council, amongst other things.

The afternoon consultations went on for nearly four hours. The paragraph-by-paragraph review got to paragraph 4 of the informal text before there was a move to discuss broader issues in the last half hour or so. At the end of the day a new draft of the first four paragraphs was circulated. Each of the new paragraphs contains many examples of bracketed text – a feature missing from the informal text. (A traditional method of international negotiation is to put text for which there is no agreement between square brackets and there can sometimes be multiple versions of texts in brackets. The difficulty can be that, once there is one pair of brackets in a text, they can proliferate quickly).

Ambassador Lyn Parker's analogy with mountaineering given in his comments to the Open Forum (see yesterday's *Report*) provides some yardsticks for progress for the Review Conference. It would seem that there was a little hesitation as to the best route to depart from base camp and, once an initial direction of movement was decided, the terrain was found to be difficult to cross.

Non-Proliferation

A focus of disagreement regarding the informal text is the term 'non-proliferation'. It is a loaded term as it carries overtones that something is spreading from one point to another.

Once chemical weapons destruction is complete there should be nowhere for 'proliferation' to start from. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe the post-destruction era as needing policies to prevent chemical weapons 'acquisition' rather than 'proliferation'. However, non-acquisition efforts are needed as much now as they will be in the future. The term is also loaded because of echoes of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its divide between the nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

Some states parties want to see more emphasis on destruction issues over 'non-proliferation' in the period before destruction is complete. However, the NAM mark-up of the informal text would appear to strike out every reference to 'non-proliferation' – there is a significant difference between de-emphasising the concept and its total deletion from the text.

The first impression gained from this is that countries pushing for removal of this term do not see the CWC as a treaty dealing with 'non-proliferation'. If this were the case, this would be a significant shift in policy. Take the case of Iran, one of the most vocal countries on this issue. Dr Manouchehr Mottaki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran told the Eleventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties on 12 December 2006 that the CWC 'is a truly non-proliferation and disarmament treaty in that it has designed a time-bound destruction program'. This perspective has also applied to other related treaties. The Director General for International Political Affairs of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Hamid Baeidi Nejad, told the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Meeting of Experts on 20 August 2007: 'There is no substitute for the BWC in order to effectively and legitimately deal with disarmament and non-proliferation concerns regarding biological weapons'.

Russian side event

During the first part of the lunchtime break, the Russian delegation held a short ceremony to officially launch an exhibition of photographs along one of the corridors of the conference centre. The photo exhibition, entitled 'The Safe Destruction of the Chemical Weapons in the Russian Federation', had been put together by the Russian Federal Agency for Industry (ROSPROM) in association with ITAR-TASS. The OPCW Director-General opened the ceremony saying the photographs 'illustrate the concrete steps taken that show commitments and objectives of the Convention are being implemented'. Mr Victor Kholstov, Deputy Head of ROSPROM, then described engineering and technical challenges that face the destruction programme and assured the assembled audience that progress was being made in bringing new facilities into operation. Photographs from the exhibition are to be placed on the <<<http://www.chemicaldisarmament.ru>>> website in due course.

OPCW side event

A presentation on electronic submission of declarations to the OPCW's Verification Information System was given in the Ieper Room during the second half of the lunchtime break by Per Runn and colleagues from the Organization. The new arrangements are scheduled to become operational for submission of Other Chemical Production Facilities and of Aggregate National Data in the fourth quarter of 2008 with those for scheduled chemicals in the first half of 2009. The electronic submission system would be reliant on states parties sending their declaration information to the OPCW on CD-ROM in a specific file format.

This is the fifth 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>>.