

CWC Review Conference Report

First week completed: Sufficient rate of progress?

The Second five-yearly Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) reached its halfway point on Friday. Informal consultations continued in the framework of the Committee of the Whole, with Ambassador Benchaâ Dani (Algeria) in the Chair. The Ieper Room in the OPCW building remained the location for this activity, leaving the much larger World Forum Convention Centre – the building next door booked at a substantial cost for the Review Conference – empty.

The ‘informal text’ produced by the Chair of the preparatory Open-Ended Working Group remained the focal point for discussion and the process of examining this text paragraph-by-paragraph continued. Compared with the four paragraphs examined on Thursday, 30-odd were examined on Friday – improved progress, to be sure, but not fast enough to ensure that all 142 paragraphs of the current draft could be examined under the current procedure before the end of the Review Conference. Moreover, the quantity of text in brackets being inserted into the draft final declaration is increasing considerably. The experiences of past international negotiations show that reaching agreement in order to remove bracketed text can take considerable time.

Having painted this slightly negative picture, it is worth noting there are a number of positive aspects. The first is that no unexpected contentious issues have emerged – the issues that have been the subject of disagreement have been those expected beforehand. Unexpected issues are often the most time consuming; they are also often the ones that require delegations to consult more with their capitals. The second is that the mood of the consultations is still collegial, with most people expecting that a consensus text will be achieved in time to be adopted as a final declaration on Friday 17th.

The history of Review Conferences is that they rarely go to plan. Often one process is followed and is then found to be taking too much time. However, after a day or two, a process can have gathered sufficient momentum that it is hard to change course, even though some people express their discomfort that there won't be time to complete the process. As the coming week progresses, the discomfort level will rise. This may simply accelerate the current process or it might lead to a new process being adopted. A straw poll of delegates indicates that Tuesday night is currently seen by many as the crucial milestone – if the paragraph-by-paragraph read through is not completed by this time, then conclusion of the final text might be difficult. Even then, late-night consultations look likely to be needed on Thursday. At current rates of progress, *all*-night consultations would be needed. There is nothing like the prospect of a night without sleep – especially one just before being taking a long flight home – to focus minds on reaching consensus.

National Papers

A total of twelve national papers submitted to the Review Conference have so far been published and circulated within the Review Conference in hard copy. Additional papers are understood to have been submitted and are being prepared for publication. All will be placed

on the OPCW website <<<http://www.opcw.org>>> in due course, although none were available electronically on Friday. Countries tend to circulate their papers to other states parties before the official typeset version is released; nevertheless, the late production of papers means that they have a reduced chance of being considered carefully while the Conference is in session.

In comparison, 29 national papers were submitted to the First Review Conference in 2003. The 12 papers available at the end of the first week are:

- RC-2/NAT.1 – China, ‘Report on the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in China’
- RC-2/NAT.2 – China, ‘Position Paper: Challenge Inspection’
- RC-2/NAT.3 – China, ‘Position Paper: Verification Issues’
- RC-2/NAT.4 – China, ‘Position Paper: Chemical Weapons Abandoned by Japan in China’
- RC-2/NAT.5 – Reprint of the Cuba/NAM general debate statement
- RC-2/NAT.6 – Australia, ‘Sequential Inspections’
- RC-2/NAT.7 – Republic of Korea, ‘Proposal for Enhancing the Efficiency and Cost-effectiveness of Other Chemical Production Facilities Inspections’
- RC-2/NAT.8 – Reprint of the Dutch Foreign Minister’s general debate statement
- RC-2/NAT.9 – Switzerland, ‘Inclusion of Data on Non-Scheduled Chemicals in the OPCW Central Analytical Database to Facilitate Comprehensive Chemical Weapons Analysis’
- RC-2/NAT.10 – Switzerland, ‘Article X: Assistance and Cooperation against Chemical Weapons’
- RC-2/NAT.11 – Switzerland, ‘The Assessment of the Different Types of Plant Sites/Facilities Under Article VI of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)’
- RC-2/NAT.12 – Switzerland, ‘Riot Control and Incapacitating Agents under the Chemical Weapons Convention’

OPCW side event

Immediately after the Friday morning session of informal consultations finished, a meeting to discuss the work of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) was held in the Ieper Room. Philip Coleman (South Africa), who chairs the Board, gave an introduction to the work of the SAB, including its mandate from the Convention and its reporting to the OPCW Director-General. A particular focus was the latest report from the SAB which has been posted on the OPCW’s Review Conference website <<<http://www.opcw.org/rc2/>>> with the document number RC-2/DG.1.

French side event

The delegation of France convened a meeting of Francophone countries during Friday lunchtime in order to give those who have French as their mother tongue a chance to discuss the informal text in that language – the informal consultations having been carried out almost entirely in English. Copies of the informal text translated into French were provided. It seems that the meeting suffered from the shortened lunch break because of the overrun of the informal consultations in the morning and the call to start the afternoon session promptly.

This is the sixth 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>>.