

# CWC Review Conference Report

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## The Penultimate Day: Running close to the wire

The completion of a final declaration from the Second five-yearly Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) will be a challenge to say the least. The obstacles between the situation as it stood on Thursday night and completion of a text were considerable – not only entrenched positions, but also a draft full of brackets and alternative text in such quantity that in normal circumstance would not be expected to be removable in under 24 hours. In addition, the general enthusiasm that had existed as recently as Wednesday within many delegations to try to complete the work had faded markedly.

However, deliberations that continued into the night made substantial progress.

### **The ‘other meeting’**

A selection of states parties were invited to meet separately from the general consultations to try to reach agreement on some of the areas that remain in contention. The known ‘invitees’ were: Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Slovenia (EU Presidency), South Africa, Sudan, United Kingdom, and United States. The meeting was chaired by Saudi Arabia as it holds the chair of the Review Conference. Algeria, as it holds the chair of the Committee of the Whole, also participated, as did the OPCW Director-General.

This grouping initially met in the OPCW building during the morning but later moved to one of the side rooms at the World Forum Convention Centre next door. This rapidly became known within the OPCW building as the ‘other meeting’ although some called it the ‘expanded general committee’.

During the afternoon the sense from the meeting was that some progress had been achieved, but not enough to make anyone who was willing to comment confident that consensus could be reached in time to agree a final declaration, although all emphasised the importance of trying to reach this goal. Taken together with the frustrations in the Committee of the Whole (see below), this news led many delegates back in the OPCW building to question whether a detailed consensus declaration was possible.

However, the ‘other meeting’ moved up a gear in the evening. After a short break just before 8pm, the meeting met in continuous session until rising at 4.10am to resume at 9am. While there was undoubtedly significant progress in the last hours of these deliberations, time will tell whether the decision to take a break while the momentum was in the right direction was a wise one. Having said this, many of the delegates looked tired but positive as the meeting adjourned.

### **The Committee of the Whole**

As with the last few days, deliberations continued in informal consultations in the framework of the Committee of the Whole, with Ambassador Benchaâ Dani (Algeria) in the Chair in the Ieper Room of the OPCW building. The focus in the room was the preambular paragraphs which had not yet been examined fully. Many delegations involved in this meeting felt that discussion was going around in circles and that they were merely marking time until it was clear what the outcome of the ‘other meeting’ would be.

Just before lunchtime, Ambassador Dani announced that he had offered his resignation to the general committee (the administrative arrangements committee that meets each day) in the morning but that this had not been accepted. He made these remarks following an intervention by the Iranian representative that was described by a number of other delegates as particularly troublesome. Not long before this, Iran had prompted comments from other NAM group members for proposing the insertion of brackets into language brought forward by the NAM group itself.

The text remaining when this meeting rose at 6.45pm contained many brackets.

### **Issues around the possible lack of a final declaration**

If the Review Conference could not agree a final document, what would the consequences be? The OPCW would still exist and its activities would continue. What would be missing would be the longer term review of issues, especially those related to scientific and technological development. If, however, the only document that might be achievable was one that was much weaker than that coming out of the First CWC Review Conference, would this be better or worse than having no document at all?

On the other hand, it could be argued that in the past year the CWC and the various contexts it operates within have been thoroughly examined. Events such as the OPCW Academic Forum and the Industry & Protection Forum allowed for the frank exchange of views about how the Convention interacts with the real world. The Open-Ended Working Group that did the preparatory work for the Review Conference included discussions on all of the key areas of the Convention's work. The lack of a final declaration would not, therefore, mean lack of review.

The lack of a final declaration would, nonetheless, be seen as a political failure. It would be taken as a sign of lack of political commitment at a time when more progress around the world is both desired and needed on subjects such as universality and national implementation.

Some individual countries would be particularly affected by the lack of a final declaration. When people write about Review Conferences after the event, it is always the Chair or President of the Conference that is mentioned – therefore, the Saudis have a vested interest in trying to ensure the Conference ends on a positive note. Iranian delegates have spoken in a variety of settings about the need to lose their reputation for being awkward in multilateral forums, claiming this reputation is unfair – if there is no declaration, many people will associate this with the activities of the Iranian delegation.

More significantly, the lack might be felt by those who wanted to push destruction issues to the top of the agenda. Not only would there be no text that might put pressure on the key possessor states to maximise their efforts at destruction, there will be some hesitancy in a number of states about whether the costs of convening a further special session of the Conference of the States Parties before the 2012 deadlines would be worth it if this special session – the Review Conference – could not reach agreement.

***Please note: there will be an additional CWC Review Conference Report covering the final day of the Conference. This will be published early next week and will be posted on the web at the locations given in the text below.***

*This is the tenth 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](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>>.*