

CWC Review Conference Report

Completion of the thematic review and discussion of science and technology

The last day of the first week of the Third Review Conference for the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) saw the final stages of the thematic review, a first discussion of the political declaration and a novel plenary session on scientific and technological developments.

Review of the operation of the Convention and of the draft political declaration

The proceedings of the morning started with the Chair of the Conference, Ambassador Krzysztof Patulej (Poland), bringing out a bell he had been given by the Indian delegation. He noted that he wasn't intending to use it to bring speakers to a close on their remarks but to keep it there as a reminder for the sessions to end on time. Ironically, this was the first session to run over time.

The programme of work for the review on Friday comprised the sections of paragraph (c) of agenda item 9 which read: '(ix) assistance and protection against chemical weapons; (x) economic and technological development; (xi) Articles XII to XV and final clauses; (xii) the protection of confidential information' and '(d) The general functioning of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons'.

As with the themes covered on Wednesday and Thursday, the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) consensus paper was used as a benchmark for discussion although there was no attempt to negotiate on this text but simply to identify paragraphs that would need further work within the Committee of the Whole. Also as before, the topics discussed were introduced by relevant senior members of the OPCW Technical Secretariat who also highlighted the relevant sections of the Director-General's background document.

Assistance and protection against chemical weapons is covered by Article X of the Convention. It was noted that an increasing number of national programmes were being reported. The subject of safety and security was particularly discussed and it was clear that some delegations were unsure of where they felt this issue was going. [It is worth noting that there is a particular linguistic complication here for some languages such as German, Russian and Swedish in which the words 'safety' and 'security' are the same term. In English, safety is predominantly about averting accidental harm while security is focused on averting deliberate harm, although the two concepts overlap.] The question was raised as to whether improvements in safety and security could be called for without setting uniform standards.

The issue of economic and technological development falls within Article XI of the Convention. There were many comments made that the OEWG text made no reference to the non-aligned proposal for an Action Plan on Article XI. Other countries raised doubts of whether such an Action Plan might be adopted. This is clearly going to be an issue under some lengthy discussion in the coming week. Safety and security was raised again in this section where concerns were raised that it should not be used to hamper Article XI issues.

Chair of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), Stefan Mogl, reported on the Board's activities during the year.

The political declaration was described by many delegates as the part of the final declaration most read by those not at the Conference and so it had particular importance. There were calls for it to be 'concise' and 'balanced'. However a number of issues were raised in interventions – such as universality; chemical weapons destruction; capacity

building, cooperation and other Article XI issues, and national implementation – for inclusion in the political declaration. The question of how the political declaration should reflect ‘recent developments’, the increasingly-used euphemism for the situation in Syria, remains contentious.

There were reminders that the political declaration needs to be connected to the review of the Convention. [This might seem an obvious statement but there have been meetings relating to other treaties where there has been a considerable disconnect between sections of final documents.]

The Chair, in summing up the proceedings of the last few days, listed paragraphs that had been referred to in the discussion as needing some further work. There were comments from the floor that it was the role of the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, Ambassador Sa’ad Al Ali (Iraq), to highlight what work was needed. Ambassador Paturej acknowledged this and said the list he had read out was indicative and not exhaustive and was provided, in part, to illustrate that there was agreement on many more paragraphs than there had been paragraphs on which further work had been suggested. This exchange highlighted more than any other that the OEWG text is forming the draft of the final document of the Review Conference – a situation very different from that in 2008.

Plenary on science and technology

The afternoon saw the Conference move to the Ieper Room in the OPCW Building for a plenary session entitled ‘The multiple uses of chemicals: innovation, science and security – an informal thematic discussion on science and technology’. Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü opened the session, noting the importance of keeping the Convention relevant to the advances in science and technology. The session was chaired by Patricia Lewis (Chatham House). She reminded the delegates that the history of human civilization has been based on scientific developments, from preparation of food to modern inventions.

There were two panels and further presentations, after each of which there was active discussion. The first panel, on ‘The multiple uses of chemicals’, consisted of Pawan Dhar, Centre for Systems and Synthetic Biology, Kerala, India who spoke on ‘Emerging synthetic biology trends in India’; and Robert Mathews, SAB Temporary Working Group on CB convergence, on ‘The convergence of chemistry and biology: advances in chemical protection’. The second panel, entitled ‘Education for prevention’, comprised Alejandra Suárez, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Instituto de Química Rosario – CONICET, Argentina who spoke on ‘Project in education and outreach relevant to the CWC in Argentina’; and Temechegn Engida, Federation of African Societies of Chemistry, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on ‘Education and Outreach about the Chemical Weapons Convention’. There followed a presentation from Hugh Gregg, OPCW Laboratory, on ‘Chemical Analysis in the verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention’ and remarks from Stefan Mogl, Chair of the SAB.

Side events

Four side events were held on Friday, two in the morning, two at lunchtime, all in the OPCW Building. The morning events were: ‘Legacy issues of chemical weapons’ convened by the CWC Coalition and ‘Developing a network of resources centres to support implementation of the CWC’ convened by the International Centre for Chemical Safety and Security (Poland) and TNO (Netherlands). The lunchtime events were: the ‘Open forum’ convened by the CWC Coalition; and ‘Ensuring efficient verification – what the OPCW Central Analytical Database can do’ convened by Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

This is the sixth report from the Third Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention which is being held from 8 to 19 April 2013 in The Hague. They are prepared by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events for the CWC Coalition, a global network of non-governmental groups with an interest in the Convention. The reports are available at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>>. The author can be contacted during the Conference on +31 623 426 072 or <<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>>.