

Wednesday 11th December 2024

Discussion of the S&T mechanism and ongoing bilateral consultations

The seventh working day of the Fifth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) was held under the topic of the proposed ‘science and technology review mechanism’, commonly referred to as the S&T mechanism. There was short plenary in the morning. This was followed by bilateral consultations with delegations as part of the efforts to find consensus before Friday. To allow more time for these, the Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), passed the gavel to one of the Vice-Chairs, Ambassador Camille Petit (France), to preside over the plenary. Ambassador Petit had presided over the First Session in March 2023.

Discussions on the S&T mechanism

There were 13 interventions including one group statement by Mozambique for the same group of Portuguese-speaking countries – Angola, Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal and Timor-Leste – that had made a statement the previous day. During this Session there has been a clear sense that delegations feel that the proposal for an S&T mechanism is more mature and developed than that for the international cooperation and assistance (ICA) mechanism. This was reflected in the relatively brief plenary discussion that lasted just over an hour. The structure for the S&T mechanism in the Chair’s proposal involves an S&T Review Group with participation by all states parties and a smaller Reporting Committee of 25 experts selected for their expertise. There were a number of calls in support of the Chair’s proposal.

Most of the interventions repeated points that had been made in earlier plenaries and there was significant common ground on issues such as financing. It was recognized that S&T developments were both a challenge and an opportunity for the Convention. There were some calls for what delegates perceived as improvements or clarifications. As with the ICA mechanism discussions on Monday, there were questions raised about the selection process for the smaller group and expression of the same needs for a fair and transparent selection process that would deliver a panel balanced in terms of geographical representation and gender, free of perceptions of political bias. The need for independence of the experts was stressed. Concerns were raised that, as some countries would not have experts to nominate in the relevant fields, their voices might not be heard. While many delegations expressed optimism on the prompt adoption of both proposed mechanisms, Iran expressed a note of caution: ‘it is essential that the Working Group mandate be carried out in a balanced, thorough and full manner. Therefore, no agreement should be considered finalized until all aspects are settled. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.’

These reports have been produced by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) for all BWC meetings with NGO registration since the Sixth Review Conference (2006). They are available from <https://www.bwpp.org/reports.html> and <https://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>. A subscription link is available on each webpage. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.