

Friday 22nd August 2025

WG6 discussions on national implementation and mechanism details

As with other topics discussed at the Sixth Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC), the topic of national implementation was discussed earlier than had been scheduled.

Discussions on this topic started on Tuesday afternoon and finished on Wednesday rather than being held at the end of the week. The Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), has moved on to the next scheduled topic rather than stick to a rigid programme of work.

Part of the time in the plenary room dedicated to national implementation was carried out as informal consultations moderated by the Friends of the Chair for this topic – Grisselle Rodríguez (Panama), Athikarn Dilogwathana (Thailand), Reski Ilahi (Indonesia), and Claudia Henfry (Australia). Informal consultations on the topic of organizational, institutional and financial arrangements were held on Wednesday afternoon moderated by one of the Friends of the Chair on that topic – Husham Ahmed (Pakistan). Wednesday afternoon also saw the circulation of a draft of the procedural report from WG6.

On Thursday, the Chair introduced some textual proposals to deal with remaining questions on details of the two proposed mechanisms.

Discussions on national implementation issues

National implementation is, by definition, a responsibility of each state party. This puts some limits on what the BWC as a whole can do in this issue area other than to encourage, enable and assist states parties in their national efforts, including sharing national experiences. National implementation was summarised as a holistic ongoing multi-sector process. There were reminders that biological threats exist to humans, animals and plants and that national implementation needs to be able to cover all of these. The Philippines suggested ‘budget allocation is the highest form of policy implementation’.

The need for coordination across government departments for BWC-relevant implementation was described as a ‘whole of government’ approach. The usefulness of national contact points (NCPs) to enable coordination within and between governments was noted. Moreover, any ability to network NCPs to encourage exchange of knowledge and experiences was seen as being beneficial.

Capacity constraints for both initiating effective national implementation and for keeping it under review were highlighted. Benefits of international cooperation through workshops and other training activities, including legislative assistance, were all the subject of shared understandings. While legislation is often the focus of national implementation discussions, the need for enforcement of legislative provisions was also highlighted.

While there was common ground on promotion of a culture of responsibility in science there were differences in emphasis between delegations. Some were keen on issues such as promotion of codes of conduct and methods for management of biological risks to be specifically referred to in the rolling text under national implementation while others thought this was not needed. A number of delegations emphasised promotion of peaceful uses of the life sciences as part of national implementation – both for promotion

nationally and internationally – while others indicated that Article X issues should be handled separately from national implementation issues.

The challenges of regulating materials and technologies that have peaceful uses but can also have hostile uses were discussed – this is the core of what are sometimes called ‘dual-use issues’. Previous positions on this were expressed about whether some implementation activities, particularly export controls, might be too restrictive.

The BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) gave a presentation on cost estimates for national and sub-regional implementation assistance workshops. This type of activity is currently funded from voluntary contributions. The ISU indicated that there would be benefits of having a core of activities funded by assessed contributions which would include improved advanced planning. During discussion there were many expressions of appreciation for the efforts of the ISU.

Discussions on details of the two mechanisms

The taking stock discussions on Friday of the first week had highlighted that the priority for many delegations was the adoption of the two proposed mechanisms – one on international cooperation and assistance (ICA) and the other to review scientific and technological (S&T) developments. On Thursday, the Chair introduced some new text for some of the remaining issues. No final conclusions were reached with some delegations indicating they wanted more time to consider the new proposals.

A new text was introduced on the composition of S&T Reporting Committee – the smaller body in that mechanism. This was based on the selection processes used for the Scientific Advisory Board under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Scientific Advisory Group under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In each case, a senior official makes the selection, based on nominations from states parties followed by consultations. With no institution, the BWC has no equivalent official and the suggestion from the Chair was for the President of the five-yearly Review Conference (or a Special Conference) to undertake this role. This was positively received as a practical step forward although concerns were raised if this might be a burdensome addition to the role. No delegation spoke against the idea of organizing selection via the RevCon President. The most common duration suggested for membership was three years, renewable once. [Note: from the back of the room, it seemed that a two-and-a-half year appointment duration would keep things in sync with the five-yearly RevCon cycle. In a RevCon year, nominations could be received by the administrative Preparatory Committee in April, consulted upon in the margins of the substantive PrepCom in August, and decided upon in the run up to the RevCon to avoid getting encumbered by any politics within the RevCon itself. Decisions could include who would take office at the halfway point. However, discussions in the room did not get into this level of detail.]

A new text on the Steering Group within the ICA mechanism – the smaller body in that mechanism. The proposal was again to have the President of the Review Conference to make the selection. There was less discussion on this as the membership of this body would serve as delegates of their states parties rather than as independent members in the S&T mechanism.

The Chair suggested moving text on financial arrears by states parties for their assessed contributions from the ICA section to the section on organizational, institutional and financial arrangements. This was broadly accepted, but language on what to do about arrears remains under discussion.

The last text from the Chair was introduced as a ‘food for thought’ proposal on cost-sharing contributions. This remains the subject of strongly-held divergent views.

There will be an additional report covering the final day and closing of WG6 that will be circulated to subscribers and posted to the website below.

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.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>. A subscription link is available on the webpage. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.