BioWeapons Prevention Project

report 2025-17

Friday 12th December 2025

A visit from the High Representative and a modest change of pace

Thursday, the fourth day of the Seventh Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) started with an in-person visit from UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu before continuing with the first read-through of the draft final report circulated by the Chair on 1 December. This took all of the remaining daytime plenary time. An evening session was convened, like the one on Tuesday, which again lasted for around two-and-a-half hours, ending not long after 9pm.

By the close of the meeting in the Tempus Room, page 15 of the Chair's 29-page draft report had been reached. By the time the evening meeting in Salle IX finished this was up to page 18, although page 16 is almost blank and some paragraphs were parked along the way which may be very challenging to resolve to reach consensus in the time available. Nevertheless, this is a faster pace than in earlier days, even if the increase is rather modest.

Many issues have been repeatedly revisited each day this week, leading one delegate to make comparisons with the film Groundhog Day. Would there be a happy ending if a film was made about WG7?

The Chair of the WG, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), yet again encouraged delegates to act in a way that could allow the WG to conclude its work in 2025 as urged to do so by the Ninth BWC Review Conference (2022) which established the WG. This would mean finishing by the close of business on Friday. On Thursday, the Chair was more explicit about the possibility of continuing proceedings into the night on Friday. The vast majority of states parties want to make progress on the work of the WG and it is just a few delegations raising time-consuming questions.

The visit of the High Representative

Izumi Nakamitsu offered a few words from the podium. Much of what she said was similar to the video message played to the room on Monday, but she added some emphasis on the urgency of the situation. She noted that strengthening the Convention was a priority agenda item of the United Nations as well as for BWC states parties. The BWC 'must be fully operationalized, properly institutionalized and equipped with a credible verification mechanism capable of addressing today's threats and adapting for tomorrow's'. She urged all delegations to approach WG7 'with ambition, flexibility and, of course, resolve', described the draft report as 'a solid basis for compromise and agreement', and noted failure to agree the report at this session could delay progress until 2028 – 'the world is watching'.

Some overarching points

This WG Session has been unlike any of the previous ones. Apart from the First Session that was focused on administrative and procedural arrangements, the subsequent sessions have been on substantive matters. The Seventh Session has been solely about text in the draft report which includes the draft decision document for establishing the two proposed mechanisms. The Seventh Session has been more like the final week of a BWC Review

Conference but with one key difference – once a Review Conference agrees to something, it is possible to start the planning for it straight away. This is very different from what is happening in the WG. If WG7 adopts the report of the WG, there are still stages to go through before anything can start – not least because anything agreed here has to be put to a Review Conference or a Special Conference. Whichever type of conference takes the decision, the text of anything agreed at the WG is likely to be reopened for further negotiation before it is decided upon. This has allowed some focus to drift.

Some thematic points

It is too early to come to conclusions on many of the substantive matters as this is, so far, only a first read-through. These are some points from the topics under discussion on Thursday. There were very few new points raised and the issues of contention were well rehearsed from the substantive discussion in earlier sessions of the WG.

Organizational, institutional and financial (OIF) arrangements – There was discussion about what should be decided about future staffing levels of the ISU, although no conclusions were reached owing to the need to wait for final agreement on which additional tasks were being allocated to the Unit. There was a request for there to be explicit wording that a decision on expansion of the ISU is without prejudice to development of a dedicated institution for the Convention. There were also discussions on a possible formal decision that Review Conferences should be held every five years and what their duration should be. A suggestion was made that the Rules of Procedure for Review Conferences should be specified rather than having each conference go through a formal adoption procedure. The circumstances under which payment plans could be developed for states parties in arrears with their assessed contributions for three or more years were discussed.

The International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) mechanism – A large part of the discussions were over the administrative arrangements for the proposed mechanism. This included whether the annual meeting of the ICA Advisory Group (composed of all states parties) should meet adjacent to the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP) or as an agenda item of the MSP itself. [One delegate muttered darkly in a corridor over the lunch break along the lines of: 'I'm sure people dying from preventable infectious diseases will be thankful for how long we are discussing the name of the meeting of the same people in the same room rather than focusing on building capacity that could prevent their disease!'] Whether assistance under Article X was appropriate to strengthen preparedness under Article VII was raised by Russia.

Whether the ICA Fund should be a Trust Fund with only voluntary donations or should contain some assessed contributions was a point of contention. Canada and Sweden were both explicit that they had instructions from capital for this to be a voluntary fund. South Africa noted it was hard to provide voluntary funds owing to national financial regulations while an assessed contribution could be provided. During the discussion it was highlighted that a budget would have to be set if their were assessed contributions and that this would be very different from setting a target for voluntary donations. A budget would have to be set by consensus. This would lead to long and tedious negotiations with a high probability, if not certainty, that the sum will be low to get consensus. In corridor discussions, it is clear that many delegations are already finding it hard to get agreement on the increases in their national contributions to the overall budget for the BWC with the increased levels of activities proposed in the WG.

Russia was very focused on the role of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs being named as the institutional home of the ICA Fund, arguing that this would have to be changed once the BWC had its own organization. As others in the room noted, even if negotiations started now on a legal instrument to strengthen the BWC, it would be a decade or more before any new BWC institution was in a position to be the host of the fund and any change could be made as part of the decision creating the BWC organization.

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 where a subscription link is available. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.