

Friday 21st August 2026

Some progress in clusters - but how much is enough?

As with the day before, the majority of Thursday was taken up with consultations on clusters of issues in small groups behind closed doors. There was progress in some clusters and some text from them agreed in plenary. Even where there was no specific outcome reported from a cluster at this stage there was some sense of at least a little progress. However, with only limited time available, there needs to be some reflection on how much progress is enough to keep to the timetable to complete the tasks given to the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). At the start of a very brief initial plenary, Ambassador Frederico S Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil), the Chair of the WG, reminded delegates that there were only seven working days left and that the stakes were high.

In what is becoming something of a daily ritual, hard copies of the latest version of the draft decision – Rev.4 – were printed first thing in the morning for the use of people in the plenary room. [As an aside, one delegate suggested to the current author that perhaps the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) should be supplied with paper of various colours so that delegates can easily distinguish between versions of the draft decision!] Copies of the drafts are available on the official web page of the Ninth Session which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/79378/>.

There were three plenary opportunities for reporting from facilitators and discussion about progress during Thursday – the first was when the suspended morning plenary was resumed at 12.20; the second at the start of the afternoon plenary before it was suspended to return to the clusters; and the third when the afternoon plenary was resumed at 17.40.

At the end of the afternoon plenary, a draft of the procedural report of the Ninth Session was circulated to delegates. This is based on the texts of the procedural reports from earlier WG sessions.

Cluster 1 – Unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) [India/Norway]

Of all of the issues to be dealt with by the WG, this is probably the most challenging. This has been the issue area with perhaps the strongest-held divergent views which have been held for decades. For example, some importing countries want to be able to challenge denials of export licences while exporting countries want to retain sovereign rights to decide whether an export might contribute to the emergence of biological weapons. At each Review Conference there is considerable time spent focused on this set of issues. There has never been a text that pleases everyone. As the WG Chair has noted numerous times – consensus means a solution that nobody likes but everyone can live with.

India, as co-facilitator, introduced a proposal in relation to the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) Advisory Group, stressing that much of the text was language previously agreed at BWC Review Conferences or from the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. Delegates were urged to think about what was essential to their positions rather than what is desirable.

There were interventions from the floor as to whether Article X should be specifically referred to in this text or whether there should be general references to the

provisions of the Convention. It was noted that there was relevance to Article VII activities. Should the text refer to ‘purposes not prohibited under the Convention’ or to ‘peaceful uses’ – there were arguments made in support of each of these. There were also questions about how burdensome the suggested voluntary reporting proposals might be.

Cluster 2 – Confidence-building measures (CBMs) [Peru]

The facilitator informed the plenary that ‘slight progress’ had been made but there was no specific language proposal ready to put forward. The key challenge was described in terms of finding a balance between new proposals for CBMs and other transparency measures.

Cluster 3 – Compliance and verification [Netherlands]

The facilitator indicated that the challenges included what will be discussed in the proposed open-ended working group (OEWG) and whether any possible arrangements being discussed could be legally-binding. There were ideas being put forward in relation to this cluster that the facilitator suggested could be developed further but more time was needed before presenting them to plenary.

Cluster 4 – ICA Trust Fund [Canada/South Africa]

This cluster did not meet during Thursday and so did not report back to plenary.

Cluster 5 – Science and Technology (S&T) [Pakistan]

The facilitator introduced proposed changes to the paragraph on creating temporary working groups (TWGs) so that they ‘may be established for a specific time’. This paragraph is now all in green. There was some progress on the appointment of the ‘Bureau’ of the mechanism with this paragraph mostly now in green with two elements of bracketed text, one of which relates to the consensus issue which is being held back for the moment.

There will be a report covering the closing of the Ninth Session which will be produced sometime next week.



Here is a QR code to access the page where these reports (going back to 2006) are hosted. At the top of that page there is a link to subscribe to the email list for future reports. The address of the page is also written out in the paragraph below.

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