

CWC CSP-24 Report

CW destruction, attribution, a vote on the budget and EC membership

Thursday, the fourth day of the Conference of States Parties (CSP), was presented with information on chemical weapons destruction, saw interventions on the attribution decision, took a run of decisions, mostly by consensus – with voting on the decision to adopt the programme and budget – and voted on membership of the Executive Council.

US destruction presentation and statements on destruction in China

The presentations of the plans for destruction of remaining chemical weapons to the annual CSP meetings have usually been held in closed session. This year there was only one presentation, by the USA, and that country opted to give the presentation in open format. The presentation noted that over 93 per cent of the US chemical weapons had now been destroyed, described the operations at the two remaining destruction sites, and indicated that the programme was on target to achieve full destruction in 2023 with destruction proceeding as fast as practicable, taking into account workforce safety, safety of the local communities and protection of the environment.

China and Japan gave statements on the destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China during World War II. Under the Convention, Japan is obliged to carry out the safe destruction of the abandoned chemical weapons (ACW). China noted that additional objects to be destroyed were being found more frequently, especially as economic development leads to additional land being built on. China also noted that there are soil contamination problems from leaking munitions and expressed the hope that Japan's commitments to complete destruction tasks in the next few years will be fulfilled. Japan stated that it had spent EUR2.2 billion on destruction so far and would continue to “do its utmost” to complete the destruction of the ACW.

Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use

The formal title of the attribution decision taken in June 2018 was “Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use” [C-SS-4/DEC.3, 27 June 2018]. The CSP was informed of documents submitted to the Executive Council in relation to implementation of this decision under agenda item 9(d). A number of delegations took the floor under this item: China, Iran, Russia, Syria, USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Netherlands, UK, Belgium, Norway, New Zealand, Nigeria and France. Some delegations took the floor more than once by exercising rights of reply.

China, Iran, Russia and Syria stated their opposition to the attribution decision, with suggestions being made that the decision was not a legitimate one as it had not been taken by consensus. Points were made suggesting that non-consensual decisions could undermine arms control and disarmament regimes in the long term. Another suggestion was that the attribution decision was taken to achieve geopolitical aims, rather than to uphold the Convention by carrying out objective investigations. Controversies about the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report on Douma were raised. Nigeria suggested the decision had caused divisions and that it would have been better to have used Article XV provisions on amendments to the Convention. The western group states expressed support for the attribution decision and stressed their view that, as it was taken under the provisions contained within the text of the Convention, it had full legitimacy. Points were made suggesting that a lack of response to violations of conventions, such as use of prohibited weapons, could undermine arms control and disarmament regimes in the long

term. Another suggestion was that the attribution decision was needed to carry out objective investigations and opposition to it stemmed from geopolitical concerns such as political support for the country alleged to have used chemical weapons. Confidence in the FFM was expressed.

A notable point of this debate was a request by Russia for 15 minutes of time to deliver a right of reply [the usual length is 2 minutes], which was granted. During this right of reply, Russia stated that it had met its deadline for destruction of its chemical weapons stocks and asked the rhetorical question of “which country had not?” [Note: Under the terms of the CWC, both Russia and the USA were obliged to destroy their stocks within 10 years of entry into force of the Convention, i.e., by 29 April 2007. The CWC allowed for a 5-year deadline extension, i.e., to 29 April 2012. Neither of the two possessor states with the largest declared stocks managed to meet their destruction deadlines as mandated within the text of the CWC.]

Miscellaneous decisions and reports

As well as a variety of decisions on particular matters, there are a number of reports that the CSP is requested to either approve or to take note of. They will be referred to in the formal report of the CSP. Notable among them were agreement on the scale of assessments of financial contributions and the decision on moving to a two-year financial planning cycle, both of which were adopted by consensus.

The decision on the programme and budget for 2020

The proposal for the programme and budget for 2020 for which consensus could not be reached on Wednesday was put to the vote on Thursday afternoon. This followed the 24 hours delay for further consultations as mandated in the rules of procedure; however, no progress towards consensus had been made. The vote was 106 in favour with 19 opposed, which fulfilled the requirement of two-thirds of the states parties present and voting in favour to pass the budget. Those voting no were: Armenia, Belarus, China, Cuba, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao DPR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Once the votes had been counted there was a chance for delegations to provide an explanation of their vote if they wished. Eleven delegations took the floor, most of which had voted no or had abstained. The predominant themes were a call for consensus and a questioning of the legitimacy of the June 2018 attribution decision.

Executive Council membership

The Executive Council has a rotating membership each of which serves for two years. Seats are allocated on a regional group basis and usually each group puts forward the appropriate number of candidates for the number of vacancies. The CSP then approves those group decisions. In cases where the groups cannot come to a decision through their internal processes, the Convention allows for voting by all states parties to fill the vacancies from that group. The next rotation of members requires the Conference is to elect 20 members to serve on the Council for two years, starting in May 2020. Four regional groups had decided their candidates and these were elected by acclamation by the CSP. The Latin America and the Caribbean group had four places to fill and with six candidates: Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela.

The election process started in the afternoon and continued into the evening with the plenary reconvening at 21.00 for the result to be announced in a sitting lasting less than five minutes – Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru had been elected.

Erratum – in the report yesterday the decision to move to a biannual financial planning process was conflated with the omnibus budget proposal. They were separate decisions as reported above. Apologies for the slip, *mea culpa*.

This is the fifth report from the Conference of States Parties (CSP) for the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague from 25 to 29 November 2019. These reports are written by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events on behalf of the CWC Coalition on NGOs. The reports are available at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>>. The author can be contacted via <<richard@cbw-events.org.uk>>.