

Wednesday 8th December 2010

The Second Day: Review Conference preparations

Tuesday morning of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) Meeting of States Parties (MSP) saw the first working session of the meeting which was on 'Arrangements for the Seventh Review Conference and its Preparatory Committee in 2011'. For the purposes of planning the programme of work of the MSP, the central topic of the meeting had been divided into three sub-topics. The first of these, 'aims and challenges', was timetabled for discussion in a working session on Tuesday afternoon (although a little of this took place in the morning). As there is overlap between the three sub-topics, the discussions on all three will be covered in the next daily report as this also allows for more space in this report to cover the Review Conference preparations.

Review Conference preparations

The United Kingdom, on behalf of the depositary states, formally proposed that the Review Conference be held during 5-22 December with the Preparatory Committee preceding it during 13-15 April. [*Note: Friday 23 December is a UN holiday and the week before the Review Conference there is a Chemical Weapons Convention meeting in the Hague which will involve many BWC participants.*] These dates were adopted by consensus.

The position of President rotates between the regional groups for each conference and in 2011 it is the turn of the Western Group. Australia, as group coordinator, formally nominated Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands) as the candidate for President. This was approved by consensus by the MSP. Ambassador Van den IJssel then addressed the meeting, indicating that his themes for the Conference would be 'consensus, but also ambition'. He encouraged the bringing forward of ideas and proposals, but in a timely manner, noting that 'proposals have less chance of attracting consensus if their first international exposure is at the Review Conference itself'. The Ambassador also noted that the Netherlands was considering organizing a seminar in September on prospects for the Review Conference.

The budget for BWC costs is prepared following UN financial conventions and is thus calculated in US Dollars (USD) notwithstanding that much of the expenditure will occur in Swiss Francs (CHF). On introducing the proposed budget for 2011, the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) indicated two reasons why this budget was higher than that of 2006: the first was that there had been significant changes in the USD:CHF exchange rate; and the second was the running costs of the ISU which had not existed in 2006. The 2011 budget is roughly \$2 million while that of 2006 was \$1.3 million. The budget prompted some questions from the floor. The United States and Japan both requested clarification of costs, with the former asking for a decision to be deferred until clarification had been provided. At the suggestion of the Chairman of the MSP, Ambassador Oyarce, Ambassador Van den IJssel took on his first task as President-designate to carry out consultations with States Parties on

the budget. Consultations were due to take place after the closure of the formal meetings of the day.

The floor was then opened for a general discussion on Review Conference preparations. Interventions were heard, in the following order, from: China, Canada, ISU, Germany, Pakistan, Chile, Brazil, United Kingdom, Philippines, Canada and Algeria.

The first three interventions were by the co-sponsors of the main Beijing conference in November, the details of which are summarized in a working paper (WP.1) [Note: the other Beijing conference on scientific developments is summarized in paper (INF.1)] The Beijing conferences, and other events such as that at Wilton Park, were commented on within a number of the subsequent interventions. Brazil noted the usefulness of frank discussions in less formal settings to help develop consensus. The UK pointed out that as the number of possible future events increased there would be benefits in coordination between events, perhaps through the ISU, both on timing and on content. The Philippines, noting these events, also noted the positive contributions of NGOs.

Germany's intervention was on the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) project that had been the subject of Monday's side event. Chile noted that without verification arrangements under the Convention, CBMs were a valuable contribution to transparency. Canada's second intervention was to introduce two working papers, the first of which was on CBMs (WP.2). This contained proposals for possible discussion at the Review Conference which included a suggestion that CBM returns should be translated into the UN languages using voluntary contributions; that States Parties should be able to raise questions to clarify details with other States Parties about their returns; and that States Parties should be encouraged to make their returns public, a position Canada has adopted for its own returns from 2011. The other working paper introduced in this intervention was on compliance assessment (WP.3) which proposed a broader concept of overall compliance rather than a focus on compliance at individual facilities.

Pakistan indicated it had established an inter-agency working group on BWC issues which was contributing to that country's policy development in the run-up to the Review Conference. Algeria posed the question of whether there might be benefits in having discussions on how the topics discussed in the inter-sessional process could be translated into commitments at the Review Conference.

Side Events

There were two side events on Tuesday. The first, in the morning before the start of the day's formal proceedings, was convened by the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) on the subject of 'National Implementation Status and a Recommendation for an Action Plan'. Presentations were given on topics of national implementation, including the launch of the new national legislation database, see <<http://www.vertic.org>>, reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and a proposal for amendment of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to include crimes relating to use of biological weapons. The second, at lunchtime, was convened by the Geneva Forum and the ISU on the subject of 'Synthetic Biology: Engineering a More Secure Future'. Presentations were given by Piers Millett (ISU), Andrew Hessel (Singularity University) and Robert Carlson (Biodesic). The event was chaired by Silvia Cattaneo of the Geneva Forum.

This is the third report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 6 to 10 December 2010 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Financial assistance for this project has been provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sweden.

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