

Tuesday 11th December 2012

The Opening Day: statements and positions

The 2012 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Monday with Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria in the Chair. Before moving to the formal business of the Meeting, Ambassador Delmi noted he had invited high-level representatives of other international organizations to address the meeting to examine how the different bodies could, within their respective mandates, complement activities under the BWC. To this end, the Director General of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Dr Bernard Vallat, and the Deputy Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Grace Asirwatham, were the first speakers in the morning.

Following this opening ceremony, a number of formal decisions were quickly taken, such as the adoption of the programme of work and the rules of procedure. Attendance was also granted for Israel as an observer state that had neither signed nor ratified the BWC, for a number of international organizations and for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Plenary statements / General debate

After the completion of formalities, the Meeting heard plenary statements from States Parties in the following order during the morning: Iran (on behalf of the non-aligned), Canada (on behalf of the 'JACKSNNZ' – [an informal grouping of Japan, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand]), Japan, Pakistan, Russia, China, Argentina, Ukraine, Cuba, Bangladesh, Brazil, Australia, India, Iran (national) and Kenya. After lunch, statements were given by: Moldova, Morocco, USA, Philippines, Turkey, Chile, Libya, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Malaysia, Indonesia and Latvia. Where copies of statements have been provided by those who delivered them, the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) has indicated it will place these on its website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>. Notably, there were fewer prepared statements circulated in the room than at similar meetings.

A number of themes were identifiable in the statements. In addition to general comments on desirability of universal membership of the Convention, many delegates specifically welcomed the recent accession of the Marshall Islands. States Parties which had produced Working Papers generally made reference to them. A number of States Parties referred to assistance received via the ISU. Many referred to seminars, workshops or similar events held in their countries or regions. One notable aspect was a greater prominence of calls for formal verification arrangements. There is not time to do a detailed analysis overnight, but it seemed as if there were more specific statements in favour of verification at the MSP than there had been at the Review Conference a year ago. As might be expected, many statements dealt with issues relating to the topics for this year's meetings.

On cooperation and assistance / Article X, there were references to the 'full implementation' of that article without any explicit suggestion of what 'full' means. A number of references were made to regional cooperation arrangements between States Parties to assist each other in capacity building. Many such statements came from Asia-Pacific

governments. For example, the Philippines noted activities under the umbrella of the ASEAN Regional Forum, together Australia and the USA. Canada/JACKSNNZ encouraged ‘any States Parties requiring assistance or seeking cooperation partners come see JACKSNNZ delegations’. Russia suggested there needs to be ‘common goals and modes of cooperation’ to ensure that non-BWC relevant activities are not classed as falling within Article X.

Of the points raised on science and technology (S&T), many were focused on education and awareness of dual-use issues. Broader points were made, such as concerns about the unpredictable consequences of research. Brazil suggested that norms for ‘responsible behaviour’ by researchers and industry should be nationally defined. Some statements made implicit connections between S&T and Article X issues, noting the potential of advances in the life sciences for saving millions through preventing and curing disease. Bangladesh noted the contribution in such advances in overcoming problems of hunger.

Many statements described progress in adoption of national implementation issues. Some statements, for example those from Kenya and Pakistan, provided illustrations of the complexities of implementation. Kazakhstan described some experience of dealing with Soviet-era legacy facilities dating from the Cold War.

On Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), a number of statements noted the value of the arrangements in reducing ambiguities. For example, Turkey called them ‘valuable tools for mutual understanding’. India noted that they are an ‘important transparency measure to enhance trust in implementation of the Convention’, but they ‘are not an alternative to an effective multilaterally agreed mechanism for verification of compliance’. Russia suggested recent ad hoc visits to facilities could lead to ‘false transparency’.

NGO statements

As in previous Meetings, time was set aside during the afternoon to provide an opportunity for non-governmental organizations to address the Meeting in an informal session. Statements were given in the following order: University of Bradford; VERTIC; International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Landau Network-Centro Volta, Defence Medical College of Japan and Bradford Disarmament Research Centre (joint statement); University of London; University of Hamburg Research Group for Biological Arms Control; Biosecurity Working Group of the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues; International Council for the Life Sciences; Biosafety and Biosecurity International Conference; and Global Health and Security Consultants. Copies of the NGO statements will be put on the ISU website.

Side events

Two side events were held over the lunch break on Monday. One was convened by the OPCW on the work of its Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and in particular the Board's Temporary Working Groups (TWGs) on the Convergence of Chemistry and Biology and on Education and Outreach. Presentations were given by Stefan Mogl (SAB Chair), and by Robin Black, Piers Millett, Djafer Benachour and Jo Husbands, all members of one or other of the TWGs. SAB reports are available via the OPCW website <<http://www.opcw.org>>. The other was convened by the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and France on ‘Exploring options for a BTWC Peer Review Mechanism’. Welcoming remarks were given by Ambassador Jean-Hughes Simon-Michel (France), with presentations by Richard Lennane (ISU), James Revill (University of Sussex) and Andrew Halliday (Canada). The event was chaired by Theresa Hitchins (UNIDIR). An advance copy of the UNIDIR study is available at <<http://www.unidir.org/pdf/ouvrages/pdf-1-92-9045-012-Q-en.pdf>>.

This is the second report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 10 to 14 December 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of these reports, starting from 2006, are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

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