

Friday 16th August 2013

The fourth day: national implementation

The 2013 Meeting of Experts (MX) of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) resumed on Thursday with continuation of the science and technology topic that had spilled over from Wednesday. The scheduled topic for Thursday was ‘Strengthening national implementation’, but there was not enough time to finish this and so this will be returned to on Friday morning.

Completion of scientific and technical developments sub-topic

The final part of the work on this topic consisted of three sub-topics which were taken in a slightly different order to how they were originally scheduled. The morning started with the sub-topic ‘Science- and technology-related developments relevant to the activities of multilateral organizations such as the WHO, OIE, FAO, IPPC and OPCW’. Three connected presentations described the operation of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and two of the Board’s Temporary Working Groups on the subjects of Convergence of Chemistry and Biology and on Education and Outreach. These presentations were followed by questions and comments from Ukraine, UK, Australia, Switzerland and India. The need for timely science advice to assist in policy development was highlighted. Switzerland announced that Speiz Laboratory would organize workshops on convergence in the coming year. India suggested that while lessons could be learned from the CWC SAB, it should not be copied for the BWC.

There was one statement under the ‘Education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology sub-topic in which India noted the value of national measures to ensure scientists knew of the implications of dual use research as well as international discussions through which States Parties can gain early awareness of research trends. The final sub-topic was ‘Any other science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention’ under which Germany spoke on the ‘Quality Assurance Exercises and Networking on the Detection of Highly Infectious Pathogens’ (QUANDHIP).

Sixth and seventh working sessions – strengthening national implementation

As with earlier topics, this topic was broken down into a variety of sub-topics. Before consideration of these, there was an opportunity for general comments which saw contributions from Iran (for the non-aligned), France, Germany, Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Benin, Switzerland, Spain, India, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Russia, USA and Republic of Korea. The majority of contributions were about developments within individual countries – either to implement new measures or to assess the effectiveness of existing ones – or on how international efforts could assist in strengthening national implementation – either through cooperation and assistance activities or through the international setting of standards. Many interventions were used to stress that national implementation is a core requirement of being a State Party to the BWC and that there were many facets of implementation, from pathogen security to issues discussed elsewhere in the

MX such as disease control. Thanks were offered from delegations that had received sponsorship to attend the MX and acknowledgements were given for assistance in national implementation efforts from donor countries, the European Union and from NGOs such as the Verification, Research Training and Information Centre (VERTIC).

Iran, for the non-aligned, suggested that while it was useful for States Parties to learn from each other by sharing national implementation experiences, proposals such as peer review or compliance assessment may create a false sense of assurance and what was really required were provisions for collective reassurance. France, strong advocates for peer review, introduced its Working Paper (WP.16) and noted a plan to organize a peer review pilot exercise by the end of the year. Myanmar (Burma), a signatory, described how it was progressing towards becoming a full State Party to the Convention, which included a review of its national legislation. The USA noted that prohibiting things was easy, but preventing them was hard. It introduced its Working Paper on select agent controls (WP.4).

The first sub-topic was 'A range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of the Convention, especially Articles III and IV' with contributions from ISU, Sweden, Chile and Japan. The ISU noted that European Union funding was supporting the preparation of a guide on national implementation issues, along similar lines to the guide to preparing Confidence-Building Measures published some years ago. Sweden spoke about its Forum for Biopreparedness Diagnostics which included laboratory proficiency exercises between agencies in the country. Chile focused on the control of animals and plants to control the spread of disease. Japan spoke about responses to the increasing resistance of pathogens to some pharmaceutical drug treatments.

The second sub-topic was 'Ways and means to enhance national implementation, sharing best practices and experiences, including the voluntary exchange of information among States Parties on their national implementation, enforcement of national legislation, strengthening of national institutions and coordination among national law enforcement institutions', with contributions from the 1540 Committee, Iraq, Mongolia, VERTIC (as a 'Guest of the Meeting'), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Interpol, UK and South Africa.

Canada gave a presentation on implementation of biosafety standards and guidelines under the sub-topic 'National, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens and toxins'.

The final sub-topic was 'Any potential further measures, as appropriate, relevant for implementation of the Convention'. This provided an opportunity to discuss the 'We need to talk about compliance' paper by Australia and others from the 2012 Meeting of States Parties. As debate on this sub-topic was not completed and will continue into Friday, this subject will be covered in the next daily report. One notable feature of this session from an NGO perspective was that it included the first intervention from the floor in a formal session of an MX by an NGO representative that was not a Guest of the Meeting.

Side event

There was one side event on Thursday, convened at breakfast by the United States on 'International Assistance for Public Health Emergencies'. The event was introduced by Christopher Park (US Department of State) with presentations by David Brett-Major (World Health Organization), Jean-Francois Duperre (Public Health Agency Canada) and Jose Fernandez (US Department of Health and Human Services).

Please note: there will be a sixth report covering the final day of the Meeting of Experts that will be e-mailed out and placed on the website below early next week.

This is the fifth report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 12 to 16 August 2013 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) and are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

The author can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org>.