

Wednesday 6th August 2014

The second day: cooperation and assistance

The Meeting of Experts (MX) continued on Tuesday with the day's formal proceedings discussing issues under the topic of 'Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X'. Ambassador Urs Schmid (Switzerland) was in the Chair for most of the meeting, handing over for part of the afternoon to Vice-Chair Judit Körömi (Hungary).

Overview

Of all the text within the BWC, Article X is probably the article upon which there is the greatest divergence of views. [Verification, the other great divider of views, does not appear in the treaty text.] Perceptions of Article X are closely related to how the BWC is seen overall. For those who see the BWC first and foremost as a disarmament and security treaty, the role of Article X is to ensure that the prohibitions to prevent the use of disease as a weapon do not unduly hinder peaceful activities. For those who see the BWC as having a broader remit see all the articles as carrying equal significance and therefore deserving of equal implementation effort. There are some who hold positions in between these two. Where on this continuum any particular delegate may sit depends on a number of political, geographic and economic influences.

Statements

The morning session was arranged so that general remarks on the overall topic would be given first before moving on to the nominal sub-topics of: reports on implementation of Article X; challenges and obstacles; specific measures for the 'full and comprehensive implementation' of Article X; and targeting and mobilizing resources. Statements/interventions were made by: Iran (non-aligned), Ecuador, Georgia, Malaysia, Russia, Australia, Mexico, India, Ukraine, Cuba, Germany, China, Switzerland, USA, Netherlands, Pakistan, Iran (national), the ISU and Canada. The afternoon session started with presentations from 'Guests of the Meeting' and international bodies before moving on to the allocated sub-topics of: education and training; capacity-building; and coordination of cooperation. Statements/presentations were given by the Biotechnology Industry Organization and SIGA (a company); Interpol; and the Developing Countries Vaccine Manufacturing Network (DCVMN). During brief question and answer sessions after each of these, questions were asked by UK, India, Iran and Nigeria. Statements by Italy, Canada, India, UK and Iran (national) then followed.

Themes

Numerous references were made to collaborative programmes that fell within the rubric of 'cooperation and assistance'. There was a clear sense that this is much more than just financial, with much assistance in the form of sharing knowledge or experience. A number of non-aligned states renewed calls made in earlier meetings for an Article X implementing

mechanism and reminded delegates of the NAM Working Papers on this subject presented to earlier meetings.

A key question behind many interventions was what were the circumstances in which transfer controls were legitimate activities. For example, Iran/NAM said ‘unjustified restrictions’ on trade inhibits Article X and are therefore not consistent with the Convention. On the question of where the balance lies between Article X and Article III obligations; at one end of the spectrum in discussion of this issue was a perspective that it is not correct to connect these two sets of obligations; at the other end was a perspective that effective national implementation of controls of relevant materials and technologies in an importing country gives confidence to an exporting country that exports will not be misused.

Some countries, for example, Australia and the USA, referred to their published reports on their Article X activities. Switzerland expressed regret that more States Parties were not producing Article X reports.

The database that matches offers of assistance with requests was seen as a useful, if underused, addition since 2011. The ISU reported that two States Parties had posted requests and five had posted offers. Iran/NAM said that the existence of the database should not be used as an excuse not to develop Article X implementation further. The UK said that the lack of database requests suggested the demands for Article X implementation were political rather than practical.

Particular points

Ecuador noted that Article X was vital to strengthening capacities in enhancing biosecurity – one of many interventions to make connections between the agenda items under discussion at this MX. Australia noted that effective implementation of Article X provides incentives for countries to engage with the Convention and highlighted its funding for a manual being prepared by Interpol designed to assist with capacity building. Interpol later described a series of workshops it had held to strengthen capacities against criminal use of the life sciences. Cuba alleged that the US economic embargoes on it prevented trade in medicines and was thus a breach of Article X, an allegation denied by the USA which said such trade was not restricted. Germany highlighted the German Partnership Programme for Excellence in Biological and Health Security launched in 2013. DCVMN noted the cost barriers that vaccine producers have in getting their vaccines WHO approved. India noted the paradox that some vaccines were derived from medical samples supplied by developing countries, yet those countries were unable to afford the commercial costs of the resulting vaccines.

Side events

There were three side events on Tuesday. A breakfast event on the Global Health Security Agenda <<http://www.globalhealth.gov>> was convened by the USA. The event was opened by Christopher Buck (USA) with presentations by Jyri Järviaho (Finland) and Ambassador Edi Yusup (Indonesia). The event was chaired by Matthew Lim (US Department of Health and Human Services). A lunchtime event was held on ‘International Cooperation in Ensuring Biosecurity: Utilising Mobile Units’ convened by Russia featuring the activities of the Federal Service for the Oversight of Consumer Protection, Rospotrebnadzor. Presentations were given by Yulia V Demina, Dmitriy V Efremenko and Valentin A Safronov (all Rospotrebnadzor) and Nikolai Ovsyanko (Belarus). The event was chaired by Vyacheslav Smolenskiy (Rospotrebnadzor). After the day’s formal proceedings, an event entitled ‘Strengthening the BWC through a legally binding instrument’ was convened by Russia. Discussion was led by Vladimir Ladanov (Russia).

This is the third report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 4 to 8 August 2014 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

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