

Monday 11th April 2022

## BWC finances and a possible Review Conference President-designate

The fifth day of the second session of the Preparatory Committee marked the end of the working week. The morning was started with the last statements on substantive issues before moving on to discussing financial matters with the afternoon discussing preparations for the Ninth BWC Review Conference. There was some discussion on whether there should be an additional background document on science and technology (S&T) issues. A decision on this is expected on Monday. More significantly, there was considerable progress made on the preparations for the Review Conference. There were two side events, one before the start of the plenary and the other during the lunch break.

PrepCom documents and details of side events are available from the official web page of the meeting at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/bwc-prepcom-2021/>.

### Discussion on substantive issues

The morning started with a statement by Russia marking the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Convention which fell on Sunday. This was used not only as an opportunity to emphasise the Russian position on issues such as calls for verification but also to restate the allegations they have been making about US-funded biological facilities in Ukraine. These allegations have found very little traction at the PrepCom as there are many experts highly familiar with peaceful biological research programmes in the meetings who see nothing in what the Russians have published that is inconsistent with peaceful research.

This was followed by the final interventions in the examination of cross-cutting issues. Iran spoke of the correlation between national implementation and international cooperation, in part drawing on ideas in an earlier working paper (WP.3 of MX3 2019). [It was paragraph 8 of this paper that was the basis of the Iranian ideas referred to in report 3 of this series.] There was a notable example of how language issues can impede discussion. The US described the BWC as a ‘discriminatory treaty’ using the argument that only those who are trying to acquire biological weapons are disadvantaged under it. However, this argument does not work so well with simultaneous interpretation into other languages as it is challenging to get some of the nuances across in a live situation. The US intervention prompted a few angry responses that the BWC should never be a discriminatory treaty, responding to a meaning the US did not seem to have intended.

### Financial issues

The Implementation Support Unit (ISU) introduced its report on finances (document 4). This has two major parts – one looking at the current financial status and the other giving some illustrations of the cost implications of possible outcomes of the Ninth Review Conference. It was highlighted that while the rate of payment of assessed contributions had improved, not all monies for the Review Conference were yet in place. It was noted that the Working Capital Fund, introduced in 2018, was now fully capitalized.

In the discussion that followed, there were calls for all states to pay their assessed contributions on time and in full. North Macedonia raised concerns about the so-far incomplete funding for the Review Conference and noted that it was one thing to cut

days from an MSP for lack of finances (as had been done in 2018), another to do so from a Review Conference. India reiterated its perspective that the Working Capital Fund should be paid for from assessed contributions, not voluntary contributions, and only from states parties [there is a USD50,000 contribution from an NGO in the fund]. There were questions about the 13 per cent charge levied by the United Nations within the accounts and what this represented. [*Historical note:* In 2006, when proposals were being put together for what became the ISU, it was not clear whether any such proposal would gain consensus. As people were exploring options for how to support the BWC, it was clear that the advantages of operating within the UN system were worth the costs. Moreover, when other options were explored to try to support the BWC without using the UN but remaining in Geneva the costs worked out to be broadly similar.] The 13 per cent charge includes a range of administrative services such as managing the accounts (including raising invoices) and provision of central services such as the UNOG Library.

It was suggested during the discussions that the primary problem with the finances had been a liquidity problem and that the package of measures taken in 2018 has significantly improved the liquidity situation. This position does not take into account the simple fact that the liquidity problem was manifestly more challenging because of the scale of arrears. According to the financial dashboard for the disarmament treaties based in Geneva, as of 31 March 2022, the total of arrears to the BWC was a little under USD300,000, half of which was owed by just two countries.

### **Preparations for the Ninth BWC Review Conference**

One of the key unresolved matters for the Review Conference remains the appointment of the President. Vice-Chair Tancredi Francese (Italy) provided some history to the challenges there have been for the forthcoming Conference (these were covered in report 1 of this series). The first session of the PrepCom, held on 20 December 2021, decided that the three-week Ninth BWC Review Conference should be held during 8-26 August 2022 in Geneva and a later decision by states parties to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to hold the four-week Tenth NPT Review Conference in New York during 1-26 August 2022 had complicated matters.

The unpicking of the collection of inter-related challenges has resulted in a package proposal for a solution which relies on a number of elements. The incoming Ambassador of Italy, Leonardo Bencini, has expressed a willingness to have his name put forward for the role of President-designate as the nomination of the western group. However, if he was appointed now there would not be adequate time to prepare for the Review Conference if it remained scheduled for August. The package therefore includes a proposal to move the Review Conference to 28 November-16 December 2022. While these dates would avoid the BWC Review Conference operating in parallel with its NPT equivalent, the first week of the proposed new dates would coincide with the 27th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention which might cause a difficulty for some delegations. Azerbaijan, on behalf of the NAM group, welcomed the nomination by the western group. No decision was taken on Friday on this package solution, with delegations asking for time over the weekend to consider the implications and to consult with their capitals.

The change of the rotating Presidency from the NAM Group to the western group would bring with it some changes to other positions held within the Conference. If the NAM group had retained the Presidency, the western group would have nominated the Chair-designate of the Drafting Committee and the eastern group the Chair-designate of the Committee of the Whole. With a western group Presidency, the occupancy of other roles might be expected to follow the pattern of the Seventh Review Conference (2011) when it last held the key role – the NAM group held the role of Chair of the Committee of the Whole and the eastern group held the Chair of the Drafting Committee.

*This is the sixth report from the Preparatory Committee for the Ninth BWC Review Conference being held 4-11 April 2022 in Geneva. These have been produced for all BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available from <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. A subscription link is available on each webpage. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>.*