

Monday 14th November 2016

One week completed: still much work to be done

The final day of the first week of the Eighth BWC Review Conference started with an informal plenary during which the facilitators had a chance to report on their progress to date. One facilitator then had a chance to lead a consultative session. The Committee of the Whole (CoW) then started on its first substantive part of the second reading of the article-by-article review. Openness of the output of the facilitators and the CoW was discussed.

The meeting also heard briefly from the Credentials Committee, which reported that a number of delegations had not yet supplied copies of their formal credentials and these delegations were urged to supply their credentials as soon as possible.

Reports from the facilitators

There are six areas in which facilitators have been appointed to help the states parties reach consensus conclusions at the end of the Review Conference. The areas and their facilitators are: 'Solemn declaration' – Ambassador Boudjemâa Delmi (Algeria); 'Assistance and cooperation' – Zahid Rastam (Malaysia); 'Science and technology' – Laurent Masméjean (Switzerland); 'National implementation' – Ambassador Michael Biontino (Germany); 'Article VII' – Ambassador Alice Guitton (France); and 'Future intersessional work programme and the ISU' – Ambassador Tehmina Janjua (Pakistan) and Ian McConville (Australia). This last area is an amalgam of two highly interlinked subjects, and it would be difficult for either to be considered in an isolated manner.

Some indicated that consultations had already taken place in their areas. Some highlighted work done in looking at relevant working papers submitted and statements made. Most indicated an intention to produce one or more non-papers on their subjects. Non-papers have no official status and are often used in similar circumstances to help structure discussions without dictating or prejudging the outcome. Many connected their work with the themed plenaries that will be held early in the second week. Three non-papers were circulated on Friday, on science and technology (S&T) review, the intersessional work programme and the ISU. The status of these were questioned later in the day (see below).

Article I and Article IV

Towards the end of the reports of the facilitators, there were exchanges on the remit of BWC Article IV and whether it involved national implementation only of Article I or of the whole Convention. The whole text of Article IV reads: 'Each State Party to this Convention shall, in accordance with its constitutional processes, take any necessary measures to prohibit and prevent the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, or retention of the agents, toxins, weapons, equipment and means of delivery specified in article I of the Convention, within the territory of such State, under its jurisdiction or under its control anywhere.' The Article IV section of the final documents of both the Sixth and the Seventh Review Conference calls for enacting of measures which 'enhance domestic implementation of the Convention and ensure the prohibition and prevention' of the items in Article I.

Informal plenary on the Solemn Declaration

Once the informal plenary had heard the last of the reports of the facilitators during the morning, Ambassador Delmi (who is also Chair of the Drafting Committee) took the Chair as facilitator on the Solemn Declaration. These proceedings were very similar in style to the first reading of the CoW, with suggestions for changes being made using the counterpart section of the final document of the Seventh Review Conference as a reference point, and with no decisions taken.

Proceedings of the Committee of the Whole

Once the informal session on the Solemn Declaration was complete, the CoW was convened with Ambassador Michael Biontino of Germany taking the Chair. This spent about an hour on its work during the morning, continued after lunch and then into the evening.

Articles I through IV were considered. Only minor changes were adopted, an example was the insertion of the word 'appropriate' in a sentence. Some proposals were withdrawn that were similar to others and in some other cases delegations indicated they would consult with each other where there were proposals on the same subject areas.

The continuation of the CoW past the normal meeting time had to be carried out in English, as the interpreters had gone home, and in a side room, as the audio system in the main room needed support staff to run it who had finished their working day. Only about 40 minutes of additional time was used as the NAM announced they had not yet had a chance to consider collectively Article V onwards. The CoW was therefore adjourned and the NAM used the room to hold their group meeting.

Status of non-papers and article-by-article review drafts

Three facilitation non-papers circulated on Friday and the article-by-article review drafts had been placed on the BWC website. Towards the end of the day, the status of these was questioned. Colombia noted how useful it was that the non-papers and article-by-article review drafts were on the public website. Iran suggested that these papers, as they had no status, should not be posted publicly but should be sent to delegations via e-mail, and this was supported by Venezuela (in its national capacity) and Cuba. The USA supported posting on the public website and noted if this was difficult, documents could be posted to the restricted states parties-only part of the website; noting also that there may not be e-mail contact details for the states parties that had just joined. The UK suggested the non-papers could be produced as working papers. Mexico, Ireland and South Africa spoke in favour of open web posting. As the CoW reconvened in the side room, the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador György Molnár of Hungary, announced that these non-papers would be circulated in hard copy in the meeting room, but electronic distribution would be limited to e-mail and the restricted part of the website.

Side events

Two side events were held on Friday. One, at breakfast, convened by the World Health Organization and the USA, entitled 'The New Health Emergencies Program and Emergency Medical Teams Initiative'.

The other was convened at lunchtime by the European Union, entitled 'EU Council Decision 2016/51/CFSP in Support of the BWC Implemented by UNODA: State of Play'. The second side event that had been scheduled for Friday has been moved to Monday.

This is the sixth report from the Eighth Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). These reports have been produced for all official BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. A subscription link is available on each page.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie. He can be contacted during the Review Conference on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.