

Tuesday 2nd December 2008

The Opening Day: Statements and Prizes

The 2008 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Monday morning, as scheduled, with Ambassador Georgi Avramchev (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in the Chair.

The meeting started with a message from the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. The message was delivered by Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva. The Secretary-General described the inter-sessional work programme as 'inclusive and productive' and noted the number of stakeholders outside of government that are involved. He said further: 'I also urge you to begin thinking about additional steps that could be taken at the next review conference. You might consider how to increase membership, and how to further develop the implementation support unit. You might also explore the potential for further multilateral cooperation in the fields of verification, compliance and enforcement of the Convention'.

The Chairman presented his opening remarks, saying his motto for the meeting was 'refinement, structure and focus'. He noted that the task of the meeting was to 'promote common understanding and effective action' and 'not to negotiate binding agreements'. In trying to promote effective action, 'all views and perspectives are welcome'.

General Debate

The general debate provides the opportunity for States Parties to make plenary statements. Statements were made in the morning (in the following order) by Cuba (on behalf of the NAM states parties to the BTWC), France (on behalf of the EU and associated states), Canada (on behalf of the 'JACKSNNZ' – [an informal grouping of Japan, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand]), China, Turkey, United States, Germany, Russia, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Iran, India, South Africa, Pakistan, Chile, Australia and Malaysia. After lunch, further statements were heard from United Arab Emirates, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Algeria and Brazil.

A number of common themes emerged from the papers. In addition to the biosecurity and education topics on the agenda of the meeting, many statements made reference to issues of universality, the role of the Implementation Support Unit and to the usefulness of the material in the synthesis paper.

More detailed analysis on the biosecurity and education topics on the agenda will be provided in following daily reports. However, there were some notable features of particular statements. The Cuba/NAM statement made particular reference to Article X of the Convention and the encouragement to States Parties from the 2006 Review Conference to provide information on how this article has been implemented. France for the EU described a new Joint Action in support of the BWC that was agreed in November. The Canada/JACKSNNZ statement urged timely submission of Confidence-Building Measures

(CBMs) and noted some JACKSNNZ members had published their CBMs. The United States noted that the Western Group had proposed Canada as the candidate from the group for next year's meetings – a decision to be taken by the meeting as a whole later this week. Russia examined the difficulties of the dual-use nature of relevant materials and technologies and suggested consideration of whether a permanent mechanism to examine scientific information was needed for the BWC. South Africa summarized the issues before the meeting in the phrase 'responsible and ethical use of science' and noted that in terms of bio-risks, natural disease and accidental exposures to pathogens had so far been greater risks than deliberate exposures. Pakistan expressed a belief that 'multilaterally negotiated legally binding verification mechanisms' were crucial for effective arms control and disarmament, although these words were not in the printed text circulated in the room.

Copies of those statements that were circulated in printed form will be put on the BWPP website in due course.

NGO Statements

For a period during the afternoon, the formal meeting was suspended to allow NGOs to address the delegates. Statements were given by the University of Bradford Department of Peace Studies, the International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility, Pax Christi International, the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), London School of Economics, University of Hamburg Research Group for Biological Arms Control, the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP), the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues and a joint statement from Landau Network - Centro Volta and the Bradford Department of Peace Studies. Copies of these statements will be put on the BWPP website in due course.

Coupland Prize

During its NGO statement, the BWPP announced the winners of the Coupland Prize competition. This competition had been launched at the Meeting of Experts in August as an initiative to raise awareness of the dangers of the misuse of the biological sciences and was open to undergraduate students in any country. Entrants had to imagine how they would draft a letter to their University Dean explaining why the BWC should be included as a mandatory component in the curricula of undergraduate courses in the life sciences.

The winner is Andrew Nguyen, of the Biological and Chemical Sciences Faculty, University of Queensland, Australia, who will receive US\$2000 prize money. The second place is awarded to Kirk Bansak, Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, USA, who will receive US\$800. The winning entries can be viewed on the BWPP website.

Side Events

Monday's only side event was a lunchtime seminar held by VERTIC and the BWPP entitled 'National Implementation and Universalization'. Presentations were heard from Scott Spence (VERTIC) on 'National Implementation Measures for the BWC' and Kathryn McLaughlin (BWPP) on 'Universalization of the BWC'. Work by these organizations in these areas has been supported financially by the governments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. VERTIC will repeat the national implementation element of this seminar in French and Spanish on Tuesday and Thursday morning respectively.

This is the second report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 1 to 5 December 2008 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) in co-operation with the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC). Copies are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/2008MSP/MSP2008Resources.html>>.

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