

Thursday 6th December 2018

The second day of the MSP: general debate, vice-chairs and finances

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) resumed on Wednesday, starting with continuation and conclusion of the general debate which took most of the morning. This was interrupted to consider the challenging issue of the appointment of Vice-Chairs. Most of the afternoon was dedicated to financial matters, another set of challenging issues, followed by a brief follow-up discussion from the Meetings of Experts (MXs) in proceedings that will be continued on Thursday and so will be reported on as a whole.

The conclusion of the general debate – During the continuation of the general debate, national statements were given by Panama, Bulgaria, UK, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Belarus, Turkey, Latvia, Algeria, Sudan, Nepal, Mongolia, Iran, Angola, Argentina, Nigeria, Venezuela and Mexico. These were followed by Tanzania, Egypt and Haiti as signatory states; South Sudan as a non-state party; and the European Union and Interpol as international organizations. These were followed by a joint statement from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The MSP Chair, Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), indicated that time pressures that reduced NGO statements to one intervention should not be taken as a precedent. The other NGO statements will be posted to the BWC website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Themes identified here draw from statements on either Tuesday or Wednesday and should be read alongside the themes identified in the previous daily report. Space is tight here and so additional points may be highlighted if there is space in future reports.

National implementation – Regular review of implementation was stressed and developments in national situations were highlighted; for example Nigeria spoke of a new bill going through parliament and China referred to biosafety and biosecurity policy updates. A number of states referred to regional seminars they had organized or participated in; for example, Kazakhstan spoke to its working paper [WP.8] on a seminar in Almaty in October it had convened with Germany. Tanzania indicated that parliamentary proceedings in support of ratification had been completed and so deposit of an instrument of ratification was getting closer.

Article X – Earlier calls for more effective implementation of this Article were repeated, in similar language to that used previously, including suggestions that national implementation should not be used to introduce measures that add restrictions that inhibit transfers encouraged under Article X. Australia spoke to its working paper [WP.2] on structure and content of Article X reports. Examples of capacity building activities highlighted in statements include a Finland-Tanzania cooperation project and an EU-Mongolia project to enhance biosecurity training. Global Partnership countries spoke to their working paper [WP.9] on their activities under Article X.

The additional agenda item on organization of the MSP – The Chair introduced this with an explanation of how the situation regarding difficulties in appointing Vice-Chairs had arisen. He explained that, for the two positions, the Western group had nominated an

individual from the delegation of France, with no objections being raised, and that the NAM group had nominated an individual from the delegation of Venezuela, with one objection raised by the USA. Taking part in the exchanges under this agenda item were: Venezuela/NAM, Cuba, China, Russia, Indonesia, India, South Africa, Belarus, Iran, Philippines, Venezuela (national capacity), Russia and USA. A number of interventions suggested that it was inappropriate for external bilateral issues to impinge upon the procedures of the BWC. The USA indicated it had raised the objection for two reasons: the domestic political situation in Venezuela and that it was a country in financial arrears to the BWC. This prompted further comments from those who felt this objection unfair.

The decision taken was for there to be no Vice-Chairs for this year, but this was expressly indicated as not setting a precedent for years to come. It was also indicated that in taking this decision in order to allow time for substantive discussions to take place there would be future consideration of the process of appointments.

Financial matters – The Chair outlined two papers he had prepared relating to BWC finances – an information paper [BWC/MSP/2018/5] and elements of a decision [BWC/MSP/2018/CRP.1] that might be put forward for debate and possible adoption. The MSP also received a briefing from managers involved in administering UN support to the BWC: Clemens Adams, Director of Administration, UN Office at Geneva and Anja Kaspersen, Director, Geneva Branch, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. Taking part in discussion on these issues were: Venezuela/NAM, China, Mexico, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Latvia, Switzerland, Japan, France, Brazil, Philippines, USA, Russia, India, the European Union, Germany, UK, Iran, Venezuela (national capacity).

Two key problems were focused on. One is cash flow/liquidity caused by some payments arriving late in the year when it is hard to budget expenditures against them. The other, and more serious, is the cumulative debt problem caused by payments not being received at all. The current arrears stand at some \$236,000, some of which dates back a number of years. The cash flow situation could be made easier by creating a ‘liquidity reserve’ or ‘working capital fund’ to ease flows, but this would need additional funds to be put in place. There were some calls for such a fund to be generated from voluntary contributions (which would be faster) and some that it should be paid from assessed contributions (which would give states parties ‘ownership’ of the fund, but which could take longer to agree and certainly not be agreed this week). The more structural problem of non-payment was widely regarded as being more difficult to resolve. On average, only 90 per cent of assessed contributions were being received each year. One issue raised was that any solution might impose more costs on those who were in good standing as well as rewarding those who hadn’t paid. One suggestion from the Chair was that a ‘firm budget’ be adopted that assumed only 90 per cent of funding would be received and therefore planned around. This prompted some positive support but it was noted that those paying would only get 90 per cent of what they had paid for. Concerns were raised as to whether pressure would be put on those who hadn’t paid and whether such pressures would be unfair.

Side events – There were three on Wednesday. One, at breakfast, was convened by the InterAcademy Partnership, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Croatian Society for Biosafety and Biosecurity on ‘Governance of Dual Use Research in the Life Sciences: Advancing Global Consensus on Research Oversight’. Two, at lunchtime, were convened by the EU on ‘EU Council Decisions in support of the BWC’ and by Hamburg University on ‘Biorisk Assessment: Integrated Approaches for Understanding Complex Threats’.

This is the third report from the BWC Meeting of States Parties, being held from 4 to 7 December 2018 in Geneva. 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>>. An email subscription link is available on each page. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.