

Monday 28th November 2022

The Ninth BWC Review Conference: setting the scene

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) was the first treaty to globally prohibit an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. It was signed in 1972 (entering into force three years later), so this year marks a half-century for the existence of the BWC and 2025 will mark 50 years of the Convention having entered into force. Every five years a Review Conference is convened which offers the opportunity for the states parties to carry out a full review of the purposes and the provisions of the Convention, taking into account relevant scientific and technological developments. This includes important forward-looking elements. International agreements are initially shaped by the concerns at the forefront of the minds of the negotiators during the period they were negotiated, making them creatures of their time. One common feature of treaties dealing with active problems is they include some form of review process. This is an inherent recognition that the contexts that any treaty operates within will change over time and review processes exist to ensure treaties stay relevant and up to date in their activities.

The three-week Review Conference is being held in Geneva and was preceded by a Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) which held most of its activities in April, including discussion of substantive issues. There have been many other contributions into this review process, including the experiences of the annual inter-sessional meetings – the Meeting of Experts (MXs) and Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) – held since the Eighth Review Conference in 2016 and a diplomatic retreat held in Montreux just a few weeks ago, together with a wide range of other gatherings either in person or as virtual events. More than 30 working papers have been submitted to the Review Conference.

The President-designate for the Review Conference is Ambassador Leonardo Bencini (Italy) with Tatiana Molcean (Moldova) nominated as Chair of the Committee of the Whole and Sarah Lindegren (Sweden) as Chair of the Drafting Committee.

Issues relating to the Ninth BWC Review Conference

There are a number of issues to be discussed during the Review Conference and it is worth emphasising that none stands alone as BWC Review Conferences work towards a single final document. This means that a balanced package of proposals has to be brought together covering a range of issues. An outline of some of the issues is provided here. The President-designate has appointed facilitators to assist in relation to specific issue areas and indicated that further facilitators may be appointed later.

Access to peaceful uses of the life sciences is covered by Article X of the Convention, embodying a bargain that the renunciation of biological weapons and the control of the hostile uses of the life sciences should be implemented in such a way as to facilitate and promote the use of the life sciences for peaceful purposes. The facilitator for this issue area is Ambassador Maria Teresa Almojuela (Philippines) who was the Chair of MX1 on this subject in 2018.

The ongoing rapid advances within the life sciences mean that the BWC operates within scientific and technological (S&T) landscape which is constantly changing and creating advances for peaceful uses as well as possible hostile uses. The need for the Convention to operate effectively within this constantly changing context has led to numerous proposals for some form of ongoing systematic review to identify risks and

opportunities for the Convention. Such an ongoing review would also be a practical input into national policy processes. The facilitator for this issue area is Ljupčo Jivan Gjorgjinski (North Macedonia) who was Chair of the 2018 MSP.

All treaties prohibiting classes of weapons require action at the national as well as the international level and the importance of national implementation obligations has been the focus of many BWC discussions. Not only are there many states parties with incomplete national measures but the changing S&T context means that every country should be carrying out regular reviews of measures to help keep them effective. Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) arrangements agreed at earlier BWC meetings allow countries to provide some transparency in relevant activities. Thus far in 2022, there have been 95 CBM submissions received by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), a record annual number (and the year is not yet over). The facilitator for these issues is Grisselle del Carmen Rodriguez Ramirez (Panama), Chair of the 2020 MX5.

Response to use of biological weapons falls within Article VII of the Convention which provides for assistance by states parties if a state party is 'exposed to danger' because of a breach of the Convention. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted impacts that diseases can have on contemporary societies. The facilitator for this issue area is Tiyamike Banda (Malawi).

The current ISU mandate ends at this Review Conference. Consideration of the future of the ISU will include the scope of its work and the level of staffing, which in turn will be connected with whatever future inter-sessional work programme is agreed. Henriëtte van Gulik (Netherlands) is facilitator for strengthening the ISU and related financial issues.

The promotion of universal membership of the Convention is a regular topic for discussion. At the opening of the Seventh Review Conference (2011) there were 165 states parties which rose to 177 by the opening of the Eighth Review Conference (2016). The current number of states parties is 184 with the most recent addition being Namibia.

A core area where there has been significant divergence of views is the question of verification, with some delegations calling for negotiations on new multilateral arrangements and others resisting such calls. A significant development has been the US proposal, put forward by Under Secretary of State Bonnie Jenkins at the 2020 MSP (held in 2021), for a working group which would look at further measures including those that could 'enhance assurance of compliance'. Canada and the Netherlands have proposed text for the final document on the establishment of an 'Experts Working Group' that has been published as working paper WP.2.

Influences of the geo-political situation

The geo-political situation has seen significant tensions between countries during this year. This confrontational context loomed large during the PrepCom with many references being made to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Russia has made allegations about US-funded biological facilities in Ukraine that were repeated in the PrepCom and other international meetings. A 'Formal Consultative Meeting' was convened in response to a Russian request under BWC Article V which met in September (with a brief procedural meeting in August) but did not reach any substantive conclusions. The key sentence of the report of the Meeting was: 'No consensus was reached regarding the outcome of the Formal Consultative Meeting'. Subsequent to this, Russia requested an investigation through BWC Article VI which was presented to the Security Council together with a draft resolution which was considered by the Council and rejected. The allegations have found little traction with experts from across the world who have familiarity with peaceful biological research programmes and who can see nothing in what has been published that is inconsistent with peaceful research.

This is the first report from the Ninth BWC Review Conference (28 November-16 December 2022). These reports have been produced for all BWC meetings with NGO registration since the Sixth Review Conference (2006) 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. Financial support for these reports has been gratefully received from Global Affairs Canada. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Tuesday 29th November 2022

The opening of the Review Conference and the start of the general debate

The Ninth five-yearly Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) met in Salle XIX of the Palais des Nations, one of the more modern conference rooms which allows for proceedings to be viewed on the UN Web TV service. The official BWC website for the Review Conference can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/bwc-revcon/biological-weapons-convention-ninth-review-conference-2022> which includes links to official documents and to other information.

The opening of the Conference

The Conference was opened by Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs who oversaw the election of Ambassador Leonardo Bencini (Italy) as President. On taking his place on the podium, the President thanked the Conference for expressing confidence in him and noted that the Review Conference was one year late because of the pandemic, but that the effects of the pandemic had also meant that the preparation time for this Review Conference was much shorter than usual. He noted that there were numerous working papers tabled, many containing concrete proposals that were well developed and were ripe for action rather than continued consideration.

The opening formalities were fairly brief, with the usual steps such as the adoption of the agenda and decisions on participation of observer states and international bodies, etc. The rules of procedure were adopted as adjusted to follow past practice which includes that Committees may decide to hold certain meetings in public. The President noted the attendance of national experts from developing countries supported through the sponsorship programme operated by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and thanked those who financially supported the programme.

The meeting moved on to the appointment of office holders within the Conference. Russia took the floor to highlight that their nominations to positions had been blocked within the Eastern European Group (EEG) by one, unnamed, member of the Group. Russia had therefore decided to withdraw from the EEG and establish a 'one state group', claiming that this new group would have equivalent status to the other regional groups. Nevertheless, all Conference positions were allocated via the three long-standing regional groups. Tatiana Molcean (Moldova) was confirmed as Chair of the Committee of the Whole and Sarah Lindegren (Sweden) as Chair of the Drafting Committee. The Chair of the Credentials Committee is to be an unnamed member of the delegation of South Africa. Other positions agreed included Vice-Presidents of the Conference and Vice Chairs of the Committees, but not all positions were filled as the regional groups had not completed their internal nomination processes and so this agenda item would remain open. The appointed facilitators remain as listed in the first of this series of daily reports.

In introducing the indicative programme of work, published on the Conference website, the President noted he would be inviting the four Chairs of the Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) held each year from 2017 through 2020 to address a plenary session. He also indicated he wished to hold as many meetings in public as possible. [*Historical note:* the meetings of the Committee of the Whole during the Eighth Review Conference (2016) were in public for the first reading of the article-by-article review and remained so for

most of the second reading before moving into private session. They were entirely in public during the Seventh Review Conference (2011). The Drafting Committee has not been convened since the Fifth Review Conference (2001 & 2002) and it is not clear from the records available to this author whether those meetings were public or private.]

Substantive discussions

The substantive discussions started with a brief video address from UN Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres who noted that when the BWC was negotiated the global community came together to declare that the deliberate use of disease as a weapon was an affront to humanity. He urged considerations of three specific actions: to ‘give teeth’ to the BWC’s ‘accountability provisions’ to ensure that scientific advances are not exploited for hostile purposes; to ‘update our thinking on verification and compliance to fit today’s threats’; and to provide the increased financial and human resources the BWC needs to carry out this important work.

High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu then addressed the Conference. She suggested that no topic should be off the table in the quest to strengthen the BWC. She focused on four steps which addressed the UNSG’s three actions in a slightly different formulation in which she spoke of the need to ‘operationalize’ and ‘institutionalize’ the BWC, providing it with appropriate resources and exploring verifying compliance.

The exchanges of views in the general debate – the opportunity for delegations to outline their positions in public statements – started with ‘high-level statements’ (those made by visiting dignitaries above the rank of ambassador rank), statements on behalf of groups of states and then national statements. Where copies of statements have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on the Conference website. High-level statements were given by Italy, Kazakhstan and Serbia. Group statements were given by Azerbaijan (for the non-aligned group of BWC states parties), the European Union, Belarus (for the Collective Security Treaty Organization [CSTO]), Germany (for the Global Partnership), Russia (for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO]), Cambodia (for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN]), Russia (for the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS]) and Estonia (for the Baltic states). National statements were given by Russia, Colombia, Finland, Uruguay, France, India, Pakistan, Lao PDR, Republic of Korea, Moldova, Georgia, Japan, Nepal, China, Czechia, Philippines, Kuwait, Iraq, Germany Dominican Republic, Netherlands, Australia, Singapore, Mongolia, Indonesia, Chile, Canada, Timor Leste, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland, Türkiye, Sweden, Austria and Algeria. Rights of reply statements were given by Moldova, Russia and Georgia.

With the general debate to continue well into Tuesday it is too early to identify many themes or common threads. One notable development is the prominence given to gender issues which, by comparison, were hardly mentioned at the last Review Conference. As might be expected in light of the geo-political situation, the Ukraine situation was often referred to with many statements describing the Russian allegations about biological research in Ukraine as being groundless. Russia raised numerous points of order claiming that discussion of the invasion of Ukraine was outside the scope of the BWC and used its rights of reply to suggest that only Western states were describing its allegations as groundless. Moldova used its right of reply to clarify it does not take part in political and military meetings of the CIS and so was not party to that group statement.

Side events

There were five side events on Monday – one at breakfast, two at lunchtime and two in the evening. Details are given on the Conference website. As the Review Conference progresses, there will hopefully be more space to report on the side events in these reports.

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Wednesday 30th November 2022

The second day: the general debate and points of order

The second day of the Ninth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) saw the continuation of the plenary exchange of views known as the general debate.

High-level statements were made by the UK and the USA. These were followed by statements from Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Malaysia, Argentina, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Burkina Faso, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Mexico, Poland, Mozambique, Cuba, Norway, Morocco, El Salvador, Namibia, Montenegro, Iran, Hungary, Peru, Venezuela, Ireland, Ukraine, Samoa, Belgium, Holy See, Ecuador, Kenya, Slovakia, Romania, Brazil, State of Palestine, Panama, Qatar, Portugal, Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Thailand, Bolivia, Niger, South Africa, Jordan and Sudan. Egypt made a statement as a signatory state. This was followed by rights of reply statements from the USA, Russia, Israel and State of Palestine. The Conference then moved on to statements from international organizations and UN agencies: the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, the UN Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, the World Organization for Animal Health, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Interpol and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (partial).

The statement by Ukraine included comments on the military situation there. Four points of order were raised by Russia during this statement, each time with the claim that issues being raised were outside of the remit of the BWC. In response, each time, the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador Leonardo Bencini of Italy, ruled that he wanted to give delegates some flexibility and allow them to develop their arguments to show why what they were raising was relevant to the BWC. At the end of the national statements, the USA used its right of reply to highlight that senior Russian political figures had made remarks claiming to justify the military action because of supposed evidence of components of biological weapons being made in Ukraine. This, the US argued, meant the invasion was relevant to the BWC. In reply, Russia argued that the West was trying to avoid awkward questions about military-sponsored research in Ukraine. The statements by international bodies ran smoothly until NATO spoke of Russian disinformation in relation to Ukraine. Russia raised points of order claiming the rules of procedure did not allow for oral statements from observer organizations. In view of the late hour, the President suggested suspending the meeting to return to this question in the morning. The NATO statement was thus partially presented.

General debate themes

This discussion on themes draws from statements given on Monday and Tuesday and themes are listed in no particular order. Further themes including national implementation, Article VII issues and the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) will be explored in future daily reports.

Universality – As with all BWC meetings there were calls for universal membership of the BWC with reminders that the Convention cannot achieve its overall aims if there is even one state outside of it that might be capable of acquiring or using biological weapons. There were welcoming words for the states parties that had joined

since the last Review Conference and many specific welcomes for Namibia which had joined in 2022. Many statements called for states that were not yet parties to join the Convention.

Article X / cooperation and assistance – This is an issue area where there have been consistent strongly held views with no obvious significant changes in overarching positions from those put forward in earlier meetings. Calls for creation of a cooperation committee were made by those who had previously done so. Issues around capacity building in relation to Article X (and Article VII) were prominent, with some discussion of the challenges of matching needs for assistance with offers. The Cooperation and Assistance Database, commonly known as the ‘Article X database’, was mentioned many times together with suggestions that it would be useful to improve its functionality. The France/Senegal/Togo ‘SecBio’ proposal was highlighted as a way to help implement Article X. There were calls for the addition of a cooperation and assistance officer to the ISU. There seemed to this author to be fewer explicit calls for Article X to be a specific topic in any future inter-sessional work programme but this may simply reflect that most states expect it to be so and therefore focus on calling for other things.

Review of scientific and technological (S&T) developments – No statements disagreed with the idea that there are rapid S&T changes that BWC states parties need to be aware of. Almost all statements referring to S&T issues were explicitly in favour of some form of ongoing systematic review process, notwithstanding some differences in perspectives on how such a process might be structured. Iran, which has had a long-standing focus on cooperation and assistance issues, had a different emphasis, suggesting that any review process for S&T developments within the context of the Convention ‘should have tangible results for developing states’. There were calls for the addition of an S&T officer to the ISU.

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) – The record number of submissions this year (95 so far) was noted by a number of delegations with a few noting that this was not much more than half of the number of states parties (currently 184). There were calls to improve the number of returns as well as some calls to improve the quality of information provided. Only one substantive suggestion for amending the information submitted was put forward which was by Russia calling for military-funded labs outside the territory of a state party to be reported. Unlike earlier meetings there was little expression of encouragement for states parties to make CBM returns public.

Compliance / verification / proposal for a temporary expert working group – A large number of statements suggested that the BWC would be significantly strengthened if it had some form of compliance measures. Some statements highlighted the US withdrawal from the negotiations for a protocol that had been taking place in the Ad Hoc Group and called specifically for a return to the protocol negotiations. These were consistent with similar statements made over the years. But there were many statements with a somewhat changed tone, including a number of Western states calling for formal compliance measures who had been much more muted in the past when they were aware the US would have opposed progress in this area. There were numerous expressions of support for the temporary expert working group proposal in the Canada/Netherlands working paper. The US statement referred to the need for a better understanding of what was required for an effective understanding of compliance and, for the first time in many Review Conferences, used the term ‘verification measures’ in a positive context.

Side events

There were four side events on Tuesday – two at breakfast and two at lunchtime. Details are provided on the Conference website.

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Thursday 1st December 2022

The third day: NGOs, MSP Chairs and the Committee of the Whole

The Ninth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued its work on Wednesday. In normal circumstances the Conference would have carried on with statements from international organizations and UN agencies as part of the general debate. However, the divergence of views on the continuation of those statements expressed at the end of Tuesday's session appeared to remain unresolved on Wednesday. Instead, the informal session for NGO statements was convened before adjourning for the rest of the morning. The afternoon saw a plenary session in which the Chairs of three of the four Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) of the recently completed inter-sessional work programme addressed the Conference to pass on their experiences. This was then followed by the opening of the Committee of the Whole.

NGO statements

Following recent practice, there was a joint statement from some NGOs followed by statements from: Biosecure; Bronic; Council on Strategic Risks; University of Bradford; George Mason University; Hamburg Research Group; Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights; Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security; Center for Biodefense and Global Infectious Diseases; King's College London; VERTIC; and the Center for Biosafety Research and Strategy at Tianjin University. As with statements given in other sessions, where copies of statements are provided by those who delivered them, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) will place these on the Review Conference website which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/bwc-revcon/biological-weapons-convention-ninth-review-conference-2022>.

The experiences of the MSP Chairs

In introducing this session, President of the Review Conference Ambassador Leonardo Bencini (Italy) noted that the Conference was not starting from scratch but had many inputs it could consider and reminded delegates that the Report of the 2017 MSP had included: 'The Ninth Review Conference will consider the work and outcomes it receives from the Meetings of States Parties and the Meetings of Experts and decide by consensus on any inputs from the intersessional programme and on any further action.'

The Chair of the 2017 MSP, Amandeep Singh Gill (India), noted that the MSP that year had been tasked by the Eighth Review Conference (2016) to aim for consensus on an inter-sessional programme which he described as 'not an easy outcome', but that it had produced a new structure for the work. He highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had underlined the importance of the inter-sessional work and urged delegates to come together to agree a substantial inter-sessional process from this Review Conference. Ljupčo Gjorgjinski (North Macedonia), Chair of the 2018 MSP, suggested that the work programme had 'accomplished quite a lot on substance, but very little on making effective use of that substance'. He discussed the work on BWC finances that year and used this as an example of how annual political meetings can steer implementation but highlighted that the links between the technical and political meetings were not good. This was also highlighted by Yann Hwang (France), Chair of the 2019 MSP, who reminded delegates of

his *Aide Mémoire*, drawn up in collaboration with the Chairs of the Meetings of Experts (MXs) that year, to collate the proposals made during the 2019 MXs in order to carry forward topics into the 2020 meetings and then onwards to the Ninth Review Conference. Although the publication of this *Aide Mémoire* as an official document was blocked by one delegation without explanation, it was posted on the website of that meeting as CRP.1; he invited delegates to the Review Conference to read it. He suggested that the Chairs of future MSPs could form a Troika in order to provide continuity of leadership. The President informed the Conference that the Chair of the 2020 MSP, Cleopa Mailu (Kenya), had been invited to speak but had been called away for urgent business.

The convening of the panel of past MSP Chairs was an innovation for this Review Conference and appeared to provide useful inputs to delegations.

The Committee of the Whole (CoW)

The CoW convened for its first meeting with Ambassador Tatiana Molcean (Republic of Moldova). The aim of the early meetings of the CoW is to do a ‘first reading’ of the article-by-article review. The first reading is intended to allow a compilation of suggestions without lengthy discussion. Once the compilation has been put together, a ‘second reading’ can be carried out with the advantages and disadvantages of the various suggestions being debated. Owing to clarifications being requested behind the scenes about the proposed roles of the CoW and the Drafting Committee (which is yet to convene), the CoW meeting started with a ‘cross-sectoral’ session to allow the introduction of proposals by delegations that would not have fallen within the article-by-article review. With the questions regarding the Committee roles remaining under discussion, this was a pragmatic solution for maintaining the flow of the substantive work of the Conference. The CoW then moved on to the article-by-article review.

Ambassador Molcean asked for delegations to be ‘precise and concise’ in order to make effective use of time before opening the floor for the cross-sectoral session. All but one of the proposals put forward in this session were contained in working papers that have been published; the other was a proposal from Cuba for which the working paper will be published soon. These proposals will be reported in more detail as they each become the subject of focused discussion.

The article-by-article first reading considered Articles I to III in turn, although one delegation asked for more time to prepare its comments in relation to Article II.

General debate themes (continued)

This continuation of discussion on themes draws from statements given on Monday and Tuesday. Further themes, including national implementation, Article VII issues and financial issues, will be explored in future daily reports.

Implementation Support Unit (ISU) – References to the ISU were made in most statements with many expressions of gratitude for its work. There were suggestions that the ISU could be put on a more permanent footing rather than requiring its mandate to be renewed at each Review Conference. This would allow for improved strategic planning. There were proposals for additions of posts in the form of a science officer and a cooperation officer, with a recognition that these would have resource implications. There were acknowledgements that the tasks allocated to the ISU would be affected by whatever decisions were made for a future inter-sessional process.

Side events

There were four side events on Wednesday – two at breakfast and two at lunchtime. Details are provided on the Conference website.

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Friday 2nd December 2022

The Committee of the Whole continues its first reading

The proceedings of the Ninth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) on Thursday were dedicated to the Committee of the Whole (CoW). Although the indicative programme of work had suggested that the Drafting Committee would be convened for the first time on Thursday after lunch, the CoW continued into the afternoon. Informal interactions with delegates suggest there has been a greater emphasis on the CoW in their minds. In part, this seems to stem from familiarity amongst some delegates with the CoW as they have been reading up about recent Review Conferences in preparation for this one. Similarly there has been some uncertainty stemming from unfamiliarity with the Drafting Committee which has not been convened since the Fifth Review Conference (2001).

The situation with regards to statements from international organizations and UN agencies as part of the general debate appears to remain unresolved.

During the day, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) informed the Conference that the morning session was the last at this time to be carried by the UN Web TV service owing to cost implications. Those wishing to follow the Conference remotely can receive the live audio stream for each of the official UN languages when meetings are held in public via the UN Listen Live service at <https://listen-live.unog.ch/> – the BWC Review Conference is in Salle XIX. Recordings and automated transcripts of the audio channel in English are available via <https://indico.un.org/event/1001123/page/1018-transcripts-automatic> and the ISU noted that tests are being carried out to create automated transcripts of other official UN languages.

The Committee of the Whole

The CoW met for sessions in both the morning and the afternoon with Ambassador Tatiana Molcean (Republic of Moldova) in the Chair. The ‘first reading’ of the article-by-article review continued through to Article X. While some delegations have been focused on proposals for text for the article-by-article review, there have been interventions that have been on the substance of issues. This is healthy, if time consuming. A particular problem of Review Conferences is that they are carrying out two tasks at the same time – one is to review the operation of the Convention and the other is to negotiate a document that represents that review. The inevitable result is that there are many times that the review of the Convention becomes dominated by a discussion of what particular words might be in the final text rather than truly reviewing the issues themselves.

Once the first reading has been completed, a compilation of suggestions will be circulated. Past practice has been that the compilation is public (either as one file or as a file for each article) and so specific proposals are not highlighted in this report for reasons of space.

General debate themes (continued)

This continuation of discussion on themes draws from statements given on Monday and Tuesday. As before, themes are listed in no particular order.

National implementation – The importance of appropriate national measures to implement the BWC was stressed by many delegations. A number of statements made reference to a specific step forward such as draft legislation being introduced to or passed by the national legislative assembly. While there is widespread recognition that there can be no ‘one size fits all’ approach to national implementation owing to the great variation in national contexts, the benefits for states of drawing on experiences elsewhere were referenced. Many delegations highlighted overlaps or synergies between BWC-related activities at the national level and national implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1540 which deals with preventing non-state actors acquiring WMD-related materials [and which was renewed for 10 years at the Security Council on Wednesday].

Article VII issues – This is the issue area where there is the clearest collective will to achieve progress as all states are aware that the humanitarian consequences of a biological attack on a significant scale would be difficult to respond to with only national resources. Many statements noted a greater awareness of these challenges that were highlighted by the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were many expressions of support for the South African proposal for guidelines on requesting Article VII assistance and for the proposal by France and India for a database to contain offers of capacities that might be utilised in the event of an attack but also offers and requests for capacity building in relation to Article VII. While care has been taken to draw a distinction between the existing Article X database and the proposed Article VII database, a number of statements highlighted the connections between Article VII and Article X issues in areas such as capacity building and providing access to relevant materials. The possibility of establishing a voluntary trust fund to support assistance activities was mentioned a few times. Russia repeated its proposal in relation to deployment of mobile biomedical facilities.

Financial issues – The financial situation for the BWC has been much improved since the Eighth Review Conference (2016), not least because of political attention but also through decisions taken at the 2018 Meeting of States Parties, including the establishment of the Working Capital Fund. There were calls for governments to pay their assessed financial contributions in full and on time in order to sustain the Convention and improvements in this area meant the current level of arrears is substantially lower than six years ago. A number of statements emphasised that if there were going to be significant improvements to the implementation of the BWC at a multilateral level there would need to be the funds available to support them, whether this was for additional meeting time or for additional staff.

Inter-sessional work programme – Many delegations spoke of the importance of the work between Review Conferences and of benefits of holding annual political meetings. There is much less common ground when it comes to the specifics of what else might be included. Elements of what might be within a work programme have been described in other themes in these reports – examples include a review of scientific and technological (S&T) developments, a temporary experts working group on compliance issues, a review of Confidence-Building Measures, and Article X cooperation and assistance issues. Each of these areas, and other proposals being presented, has their advocates and it will be a key task of the Review Conference to accommodate the variety of perspectives taking into account both political and financial aspects. One divergence of views is on whether annual meetings could amend what was being considered in the work programme and whether they could take substantive decisions.

Side events

There were two side events on Thursday – one at breakfast and one at lunchtime. Details are provided on the Conference website.

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