

Friday 9th December 2022

Bowled over at the Ninth BWC Review Conference

The second Thursday at the Ninth Review Conference for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) saw further work behind closed doors by the informal plenary that is pretending not to be the Drafting Committee and the Committee of the Whole (CoW), meeting in public, nearly completing its second reading of the article-by-article review. The evening saw the revival of the alternative BWC – the ‘Bowling World Cup’.

Schrödinger’s Committee

The informal plenary that is and is not the Drafting Committee met in closed session during the morning with Sara Lindegren (Sweden) presiding. From what has been said of the proceedings there has been much repetition with what is being said by delegations in the CoW. Work continues on the basis of the elements paper prepared by the facilitators. One significant point was a desire by some states to provide greater stability to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) by giving it a mandate of an open duration rather than being renewed each Review Conference. This was blocked on the basis that the ISU should be replaced whenever a legally-binding measure to strengthen the BWC is adopted.

The Committee of the Whole – second reading

The CoW met in the afternoon with Ambassador Tatiana Molcean (Republic of Moldova) in the Chair. The CoW continued with the ‘second reading’ of the article-by-article review which involves working through the compilation of suggestions that had been received. The day started with the remainder of points made on Article VII and ended with the last group of articles under discussion.

Article VII deals with assistance in cases of breaches of the Convention and continued from Wednesday so reporting here includes interventions made on that day. There was much convergence of perspectives on this article. There was an emphasis from a number of delegations that any assistance would have to be prompt. The proposal to endorse guidelines for the process of requesting assistance under this article received wide support, although no specific language had been put forward this was expected soon. There was general support for the proposal for an Article VII database but some questions raised as to whether it should be mentioned in this part of the final document as any decision to establish it would be in the forward-looking part. Questions about database financing were also raised. There was support for reference(s) to be made to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic under this article with further suggestions that this might also include other diseases that have become sources of recent public health concern such as Zika and Monkeypox.

Article VIII states that nothing in the BWC ‘shall be interpreted as in any way limiting or detracting from’ obligations under the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Many interventions supported text calling for states that had not done so to join the Protocol, especially BWC states parties. Suggested text naming the six accessions to the Geneva Protocol accepted by France as depositary since the last BWC Review Conference prompted a divergence of views as not all of them are recognised as states by some BWC

states parties. [Note: there are similar issues arising for other parts of the draft final document on whether new BWC states parties should be listed.] Previous Review Conferences have described the maintenance of reservations to the Geneva Protocol relating to response with anything prohibited under the BWC to be incompatible with the Convention. Language reiterating this was broadly supported. France, as depositary, indicated that Bahrain had withdrawn its reservation since the last Review Conference.

As *Article IX* calls for negotiations on a Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which was achieved in the 1990s some discussion under this article reflected divergences of views in relation to the CWC. There are textual suggestions for joint activities between the BWC and CWC through states parties and these prompted responses highlighting the separation of the two Conventions.

Article X is about access to the life sciences for peaceful purposes and has long been the article for which the divergence of views has been most significant. However, the debate has moved on and has become more practical over the years, with a much greater emphasis on capacity building and other cooperation and assistance activities. Many interventions referred to the Article X database with many noting that this had not been as useful as had been expected when it was established by the Seventh Review Conference (2011). Some noted that the BWC ISU was under-resourced to support this and tasks such as helping with providing better details for offers and requests could be supported through the addition of a cooperation officer within the ISU. Some text suggestions include calls for a cooperation committee which prompted negative comments from other delegations. A proposal for a voluntary fund to support Article X activities gained some traction, but also raised questions of how decisions might be made to select activities to be financially supported. The importance of input from review of scientific and technological (S&T) developments for implementation of Article X was noted.

As with the first reading, Articles XI, XII and XIV were grouped together for discussion. As the discussion on these three articles was ongoing at the close of business, reporting on them will be held over.

Side events

There were three side events on Thursday. At breakfast, the European Union, Japan, the Philippines, Lao PDR and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) hosted a briefing on 'Efforts to strengthen the implementation of the BWC in Southeast Asia'. There were two events at lunchtime. The German Federal Foreign Office and the Robert Koch Institute convened a briefing on 'Activities to support the United Nations Secretary-General's Mechanism'. The Biosafety Association for Central Asia and Caucasus (BACAC) and the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence held a virtual briefing on 'BACAC Conference "Covid-19 Lessons Learned" impact of a pandemic on BWC'.

Bowled over (again!)

Thursday evening saw a further revival of the alternative BWC – the 'Bowling World Cup' with a large number of delegates heading across Geneva for a light-hearted ten-pin bowling competition hosted by Italy and Switzerland. The tradition had started in the 1990s and had been continued during various BWC meetings until the political stalemates of 2001. The tradition was revived at the Sixth Review Conference (2006) and at the Eighth (2016). In December 2019, the trophy for the Bowling World Cup was returned to Geneva, having been resting in a cupboard at the US Department of State.

The winner of the 2022 Bowling World Cup with the highest individual score was Barbara Hemmerle (BWC ISU) with runners up Igor Kucer (European Union) and Jelle Honing (Netherlands).

This is the tenth 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 <<https://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<https://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>.