

Tuesday 8th December 2009

The 2009 Meeting of States Parties: the opening day

The 2009 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada in the Chair. The Meeting started with the routine administrative decisions such as the adoption of the agenda and the programme of work, which follows the divisions within the Synthesis Paper. An additional feature of this procedural element was the adoption of Ambassador Carlos Portales of Chile to Chair the 2010 Meetings. Such a decision would normally be taken on the last day of the MSP, but circumstances meant that Ambassador Portales could not be present on Friday.

In his opening statement, the Chair noted the benefits of the MSP producing a 'concise focused product'. He reminded the Meeting that the purpose was not to negotiate in the traditional sense, but to 'develop common understandings and promote effective action' and noted that, given the subject matter of the Meeting, it would benefit from use of open sessions where possible.

Where copies of statements or presentations have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on its website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Plenary statements

After the completion of formalities, the Meeting heard plenary statements from States Parties in the following order during the morning: Cuba (on behalf of the non-aligned [NAM] states), Sweden (on behalf of the EU), Australia (on behalf of the 'JACKSNNZ' – [an informal grouping of Japan, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand]), Switzerland, Russia, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Germany, Nigeria, Algeria, India, Republic of Korea, Norway and Chile. After lunch, statements were made by Argentina, Mexico, Australia (national statement), Pakistan, South Africa, Malaysia, Iran, Turkey, Morocco, Bangladesh, Senegal and Madagascar

There were many general statements and there was much common ground. The need for capacity building featured prominently. The need for effective disease surveillance at all levels – local, national, regional and global – and the need for prompt diagnosis and cooperation in response to an outbreak were referred to in many statements. Many statements looked towards the next Review Conference in 2011 in one aspect or other. A number of statements made reference to the BWC's system of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs).

The Cuba/NAM statement restated calls for a 'mechanism' for Article X implementation. Most, if not all, NAM country statements made direct reference to Article X issues. Pakistan stated Article X 'is very clear and unambiguous. It does not need any interpretation'. India stated 'it is also a fact that denial of materials, equipment and technology related to peaceful uses of bio-technology continue to exist'. Iran returned to its suggestion made during the MX that there should be formal arrangements under the BWC to consider cases of transfer denials. Most Western states described development activities they felt were relevant to Article X; and some noted the obligations on all States Parties to ensure they do not assist prohibited activities through transfers or other methods. Switzerland noted

it was 'not convinced' of the benefit or feasibility of negotiations on a legally binding Article X implementation mechanism.

A number of events were directly referred to, such as an EU sponsored workshop in Brussels in November on improving cooperation between States Parties under Article X; a workshop in Riyadh in October; and an Indonesian-Norwegian-ISU workshop on the BWC and global health held in Oslo in June. Nigeria noted that it is organizing a regional workshop for the West and Central African Regions in the early part of 2010 on disease surveillance issues which would include technical managers and policy makers. Sweden noted the EU Joint Actions in the biological field. It is the first year that Madagascar has made a statement to a BWC meeting. The statement by China included a very clear and concise summary of disease surveillance and international cooperation issues.

The US statement announced that a 'senior Administration official' would explain the US approach 'to countering the biological threat' later this week, but did not name the individual. This coyness has led to much speculation, and to delegates around the room joking about this, some even suggesting that it might be John Bolton! It seems likely that the senior official will be Ellen Tauscher, the new Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, but no member of the US delegation would be drawn on this. Whoever the individual might be, the Meeting should benefit from the increased political attention that derives from a high level of representation, such as that of an Under Secretary. Such a level of representation also sends a clear signal that much is changing in policy in this area within the US government and that biological issues are firmly on the agenda within US policy-making processes.

NGO statements

As in previous Meetings, time was set aside during the afternoon to provide an opportunity for NGOs to address the Meeting in an informal session. Statements were given in the following order: University of Bradford; Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES); Center for Arms Control and Non Proliferation/Scientists Working Group on Biological Weapons; BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP); Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC); Research Group for Biological Arms Control, Hamburg; National Defence Medical College of Japan & University of Bradford; London School of Economics; Pax Christi International; and European Biosafety Association.

Side events

The US National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the University of Bradford, the National Defense Medical College of Japan, and the Landau Network-Centro Volta (LNCV) held a lunchtime seminar on the topic of 'International Cooperation, Biosecurity and the Education of Life Scientists'. The seminar was chaired by Ambassador Serhiy Komisarenko of Ukraine and was introduced by Ambassador Grinius. Presentations were made by Jo Husbands (NAS) who gave her personal views on how ethical education of life scientists has progressed; Major-General Norihiko Yamada (Surgeon General, Air Staff Office, Japanese Ministry of Defence) spoke of Japanese educational courses on ethical issues relating to dual-use research; Simon Whitby (Bradford) introduced a new on-line educational project at <<http://www.dual-usebioethics.net/>>. Giulio Mancini (LNCV) talked about encouraging inclusion of dual-use issues in university life sciences courses.

This is the second report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 7 to 11 December 2009 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/reports.html>>.

For questions during the Meeting of States Parties relating to these reports, please contact Richard Guthrie (+41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>).