

Friday 14th December 2012

The Fourth Day: process, reports and consultations

The fourth day of the 2012 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) started with a brief revisit to each of the topics of the Meeting and a much longer discussion about process. The afternoon saw discussion of the universalization report, the report of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and preparations for the final report of the MSP.

The topics revisited

Thursday morning provided an opportunity for delegates to raise any further issues within the topics allocated to the MSP. The following countries took the floor: on cooperation and assistance: Republic of Korea, Algeria and Iran (national); on science and technology: Chile and the United Kingdom; on national implementation: Algeria, Japan and Chile; and on confidence-building measures: Japan. Most interventions followed up on themes that had been previously raised.

The inter-sessional process

South Africa raised a general issue of how the effectiveness and efficiency of the inter-sessional process might be improved, the subject of their Working Paper, WP.7. This prompted questions of whether this clashed with the mandate from the Seventh BWC Review Conference in 2011. Others could see no clash and welcomed the debate on how working methods could be improved. Much, in essence, comes down to the difference between an agenda and a programme of work. In diplomacy, an agenda is derived from an outside mandate, but the programme of work is usually decided by the chair in consultation with the participants. The WP.7 suggestions focused on programme of work issues.

Universalization activities

The Chair, Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria, introduced his report on universalization (document BWC/MSP/2012/3 and 3/Add.1) after the lunch break. The Marshall Islands was welcomed as the most recent country to join the BWC. Updates on progress by other states are given in the report. Vice-chair Urs Schmid of Switzerland described his activities on the fringes of the First Committee meetings during October in New York to engage with non-parties which had limited representation in Geneva. Myanmar, which has signed but not yet ratified, addressed the Meeting and noted that, while the national reconciliation process was taking priority, the country was actively looking at ratification issues.

Report of the Implementation Support Unit

The report of the ISU (document 2 and 2/Add.1) was introduced by Richard Lennane, Head of the Unit. The report describes activities over the previous 12 months, a period for which it had been allocated additional activities but without additional funding. Of particular note are

issues surrounding production of documentation. The BWC meetings are not UN meetings, although they take place with the support of the UN and the use of UN document services. This has been done on an ad hoc basis but the ISU indicated there would be benefits if BWC States Parties were to clearly indicate some requirements relating to documentation, such as extent and timing, and therefore some text on this matter was proposed for the MSP report.

Preparations for the final report of the meeting

The drafting of the final report of the MSP usually takes place in two parts, procedural and substantive. The draft procedural elements were circulated in the morning. These describe the practical aspects of convening the Meeting and are usually uncontroversial. This year, however, there were issues raised which broadly relate to the change of the mandate of the inter-sessional process. One was whether States Parties should be encouraged to report on developments to future inter-sessional meetings or to the next Review Conference. An amendment proposed by India appeared to be the basis for a workable solution to the issue.

The Chair circulated draft text for the substantive paragraphs during the middle of the afternoon session. The Meeting was adjourned for nearly an hour to allow delegates to read the suggested text and, on their return, it promptly became clear that many delegations were not comfortable with what was contained in the draft. Most discussion did not seem to be related to make-or-break issues but was more on broader conceptual issues such as balance between the attention paid within the draft to different subject areas.

A small group of delegates met late into the evening in informal consultations through which it seemed that a substantial amount of work would be needed before a new text could be put forward. The consultations concluded at 8.45 pm with the Chair and secretariat being tasked with providing a new text for the morning, taking into account the feedback received during the consultations from interested delegations.

While some delegations seemed a little concerned at the level of consultations needed, there has been a regular pattern of evening consultations on the Thursday of the MSP for some years.

Side events

Three side events were held. A breakfast event was convened by the Netherlands on the 'Dutch Biosecurity Toolkit to Enhance Self-Regulation' <<http://biosecuritytoolkit.com>> with a presentation by Sander Banus (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, the Netherlands). Walter Biederbick (Germany), who has experience working in research institutes, offered to be a 'guinea pig' to illustrate how the toolkit works. The event was chaired by Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands). One lunchtime event was convened by Belgium on 'Health Crisis Response: Light Mobile Laboratories for Rapid & Reliable Identification of Pathogens' with panellists Jean-Luc Gala and Frank Meeussen and chaired by Danielle Haven (all from Belgium). The other was convened by Green Cross International (GCI) on 'Responsible Research for Global Biosecurity: Progress to Date' with presentations by Carrie Wolinetz (Association of American Universities), Giulio Mancini (Landau Network-Centro Volta) and Marina Abrams (Green Cross/Global Green). The event was chaired by Paul Walker (GCI).

NOTE: There will be an additional MSP report covering the final day of the Meeting. This will be published early next week and will be posted on the BWPP website below.

This is the fifth report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 10 to 14 December 2012 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of these reports, starting from 2006, are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) who can be contacted during the Meeting of Experts relating to these reports on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.