BioWeapons Prevention Project

MX report #3

Wednesday 25th August 2010

The Second Day: National Efforts and Posters

The 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC/BWC) continued on Tuesday morning, with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. However, the activities of the day had started an hour earlier than is usual for diplomatic meetings with the holding of a pre-meeting side event. This is a sign of increased interest in the Convention as in the recent past side events would only be held at lunchtimes. For this MX there are four scheduled side events before the start of the morning sessions as all of the available lunchtime slots have been filled.

In reporting the comments of the Chairman of the Meeting regarding sponsorship of experts in the last daily report, one sponsor was omitted – the European Union through its Joint Action in support of the BWC.

National efforts for assistance and coordination

The Working Sessions on Tuesday were on the subject of 'National efforts for assistance and coordination'. The session started in the morning and continued into the afternoon, although the meeting in the main room adjourned at 16.30 for the poster session.

Presentations were given in the following order: Japan, UK, Canada, European Union, Ukraine, UK, France, Nigeria, USA, UK, Canada, Kenya, Pakistan, Turkey, Canada and India. Some states spoke more than once as the subject matter of each presentation was different. 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>. Official documents, such as working papers, are also available via the UN document server at <http://documents.un.org>.

A number of presentations were on the details of national activities and capabilities for responding to a biological weapons attack. Japan focused on technical aspects of disease surveillance and how this fed into effective response planning. The UK introduced its working paper (WP.7) on national activities. France and Turkey highlighted the restructuring that has recently taken place in national emergency response capabilities; in each case, the departmental or ministerial responsibilities have been reorganized. Some presentations made the connection between national disease surveillance and the International Health Regulations.

The United States spoke of the challenges presented by joint public health and law enforcement investigations, the subject of a working paper it had submitted (WP.1). This was a theme that had started with the first presentation by Canada – which had examined the role of Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and its use of microbiological sampling during large scale events such as the Winter Olympics – and continued with the third UK presentation – which examined investigations into anthrax cases, some of which were fatal, that had been caused by spores in skins for bongo drums and contaminated heroin.

The second presentation from the UK related to the inquiry was held into the leak of Foot and Mouth disease virus (FMDV) from facilities at Pirbright in 2008. The laboratory

concerned had a level-4 animal pathogens containment (the containment levels for human pathogens are rated by separate criteria and so this is a very different type of facility from a level-4 human pathogens laboratory). Significant physical defects and procedural lapses were identified which are now being corrected.

Some presentations overlapped with issues relating to assistance for national efforts. For example, Kenya and Pakistan identified how their public health surveillance mechanisms need to be augmented in line with international best practices but that expenditure needed for resources such as additional laboratory capacity was significant. Canada, referring to the G8 Global Partnership, noted that one element of a new strategy for 'Strengthening Global Biosecurity' prepared by Canada while holding the G8 Presidency this year; was the 'development and maintenance of appropriate and effective measures to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the deliberate misuse of biological agents'. India noted its involvement in many South-South assistance activities. The EU, speaking as an international organization, introduced the working paper (WP.5) submitted by Belgium on behalf of the EU on the subject of its cooperative initiatives to improve biosafety and biosecurity.

Poster session

Following the precedents set in the Meetings of Experts in 2008 and 2009, a poster session consisting of fifteen posters from a variety of creators such as official agencies of States Parties, professional bodies and NGOs on subject matter relating to this year's topics was held in the gallery space just outside Salle XIX – the room that the main sessions of this year's meetings are being held. An innovation this year was the holding of a drinks reception in the gallery space courtesy of the delegation of Japan and its Ambassador, Yasunori Hakayama.

A variety of subject matter was included in the posters, such as biosecurity, biorisk management, examples of training methods and details of national systems of States Parties.

Where electronic copies of the posters have been provided by the poster presenters, these will be placed on the ISU website.

Side events

There were two side events on Tuesday. The first, in the morning before the start of the day's formal events, was a workshop convened by the World Health Organization on the subject of the International Health Regulations (IHR). Presentations were given by Stella Chungong (WHO), Richard Lennane (BWC ISU), Max Hardiman (WHO) and Helge Hollmeyer (WHO). The workshop was chaired by Ali Mohammadi (WHO). Details of the IHR can be found at <http://www.who.int/ihr/>.

The second side event, held at lunchtime, was entitled 'Strengthening the Prohibition through Education: Experiences, Resources and Models'. This was convened by the University of Exeter and the Inter-Academy Panel and was sponsored by the Alfred P Sloan Foundation. Presentations were given by Brian Rappert (Exeter, UK), François Garraux (Department of Defence, Switzerland), Masamichi Minehata (Bradford, UK), Michael Barr (Newcastle, UK), David Friedman (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel), Åke Forsberg (Defence Research Agency, Sweden), Simon Whitby (Bradford) and Ben Rusek (National Academies of Sciences, USA). The event was chaired by Sergiy Komisarenko (Ukraine). A book containing contributions from a number of these presenters can be found at <http://epress.anu.edu.au/education_ethics.html>.

This is the third report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 23 to 27 August 2010 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies are available via <http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Financial assistance for this project has been provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sweden.

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