

Tuesday 5th August 2014

The start of the Meeting of Experts: introductory statements and Article VII

The Meeting of Experts (MX) was opened on Monday morning by the Chair, Ambassador Urs Schmid (Switzerland). Making a short opening statement, he noted that the MX was on 'familiar ground' following the precedents of earlier meetings.

Procedural decisions, such as adoption of the agenda and the programme of work, were taken. Also decided was the admission of Israel and Mauritania as observer states; and of the European Union, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Interpol, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) as international bodies. A number of specialized agencies of the United Nations are also in attendance.

The Chair noted that sponsorship from Australia, Germany and the USA, coordinated via the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), was supporting attendance at the meeting by Gabon and Laos (both States Parties), Haiti (a Signatory State) and Mauritania (a non-Signatory State). He noted there may also be other bilateral sponsorship arrangements.

Introductory statements

Statements were made by Iran (on behalf of the non-aligned states), Pakistan, Indonesia, Brazil, Colombia, India, Kenya, Cuba, China, Russia, Malaysia, Algeria, France, USA and Mexico; followed by the European Union as an international organization. Where available, copies of statements will be posted on the ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

There were numerous calls for legally-binding measures to strengthen the Convention. Notably, Russia made a detailed statement on the subject and suggested that States Parties should 'collectively reflect' on how 'appropriate conditions for resuming negotiations' could be reached and noted that it had circulated a questionnaire on the subject to States Parties for which most of the 28 responses had been positive. The US noted it had not replied to this questionnaire as it saw this as a 'return to past disagreements' that would be 'counterproductive'.

Iran, for the non-aligned, made reference to elements of the summit statement of the Non-Aligned Movement as reiterated by the NAM Ministerial Conference during May on the BWC and the outcome of the Seventh Review Conference. Pakistan raised concerns regarding commercial influences that may create towards carrying out controversial experiments, such as some dealing with H5N1 influenza. Pakistan also requested the ISU to prepare a background paper on the 'complete procedure and mechanism' that would come into play if Article VII were to be invoked. Brazil raised questions as to whether it was appropriate for the MX to discuss compulsory licensing of exports, as had been noted in the 2013 MX synthesis paper. Colombia noted that the preparation of its Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) return had enhanced inter-agency cooperation and noted progress in

drafting new legal measures to strengthen national implementation of the Convention. India remarked that while there were useful complementary measures that the BWC benefited from through cooperation with other bodies such as the WHO, especially in relation to Article VII, this did not replace the lack of an institution within the BWC itself. Kenya highlighted progress in implementation of biosecurity measures within the country at both governmental and non-governmental levels. France provided an update to its work on a peer review mechanism.

NGO statements

Non-governmental organizations addressed the meeting in an informal session, which bracketed the lunch break. Statements were given by: University of Bradford; University of London; International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Verification Research, Training and Information Centre; Pax Christi International; Scientists' Working Group on CBW; Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; Landau Network Centro Volta and the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; University of Bath; and University of Calgary iGEM team. These statements are to be posted on the ISU website.

BWC Article VII

The afternoon session discussed the new biennial topic: 'How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties'.

The ISU introduced two of their background papers: INF.2 on understandings reached at earlier BWC meetings on Article VII and INF.1 on international organizations with capacities relevant to provision of Article VII assistance. Representatives from OIE, WHO, OPCW, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ICRC, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs then gave presentations on their activities relevant to the discussion topic. This was followed by statements from: Germany, Iran (for the non-aligned), Haiti, South Africa, Australia, Canada, France, USA, UK, and India. The need for effective disease surveillance measures was highlighted, together with common elements of responses to naturally and deliberately occurring outbreaks of disease. References were made to the ongoing Ebola outbreak in West Africa and lessons learned from that situation. Distinctions were made between the provision of assistance to the victims of an attack on an humanitarian basis and assistance to the government of a country subject to an attack. Developments relating to the UN Secretary-General's investigation mechanism, including lessons learned from the investigation into use of chemical weapons in Syria were raised. The need for an inventory or survey of sources of possible assistance was emphasised. A number of national statements introduced Working Papers, some of which are yet to be circulated.

Side event and poster session

A lunchtime event was held entitled 'Viral Gale', an interactive tabletop exercise relating to a smallpox outbreak scenario. The event was led by Bob Kadlec (East West Protection LLC) and JR Bhardwaj (former Director General Armed Forces Medical Service, India). It was sponsored by Bavarian Nordic, a manufacturer of smallpox vaccine.

At the end of the day, a poster session on subjects relevant to the topics under discussion at the MX was held with refreshments provided by members of the Global Partnership Biosecurity Working Group. Where available, electronic copies of the posters will be placed on the ISU website.

This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 4 to 8 August 2014 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

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