

Wednesday 7th December 2011

The Second Day: themes from the general debate

The Seventh BWC Review Conference continued on Tuesday with further general debate. Before the formal proceedings, the General Committee (also known as the Bureau) which deals with administrative arrangements, met for the first time. The President, Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands), informed the Conference that the Bureau had agreed with his plan to hold informal plenary sessions on cross-cutting issues in between sessions of the Committee of the Whole which will do the article-by-article review. He proposed that the final document should follow the three-part format used in 2006 and indicated a desire to circulate a first draft of the final document, in the name of the President, on Thursday 15 December, although this would depend on progress in the relevant meetings.

There was an opportunity for non-governmental organizations to address the Conference in an informal session on Tuesday afternoon. A total of 17 statements were made during this session. For space reasons these will be reported in the next daily report.

General Debate

Although the scheduling for the general debate usually makes a distinction between contributions from States Parties, Signatory States and observer organizations, some flexibility in the sequence of statements made more effective use of time as some presenters were only available at certain times for reasons such as travel arrangements. Statements were given by: Algeria, Estonia, Argentina, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bangladesh, Republic of Korea, Chile, Pakistan, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Qatar, Madagascar, Iraq, Ecuador, Egypt (as a Signatory State), European Union (as an observer organization), and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. After lunch, this continued with: Kuwait, Ireland, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the International Committee of the Red Cross, Colombia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

There are a number of common and contrasting themes within the statements made on Monday and Tuesday. Many of the themes overlap, such as when there were suggestions that Article X implementation be regularly on the agenda of any new inter-sessional process.

Most statements made some reference to the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and its future, many indicating how useful it had been. No suggestions were made to let its mandate lapse. Much was made of the possibilities of expanding its role, however this would inevitably mean additional staff. If the ISU was to be expanded, a number of statements, particularly from NAM states, stressed the issue of geographically equitable spread of staff. Any change of the size of the ISU would be linked to definitions of tasks to be undertaken – much of which may be heavily dependent on what was within the new inter-sessional process.

On the inter-sessional process, there were statements by some states that this activity was appropriate for some subjects that had been topics of meetings, but not others. Most notable in this latter category were compliance issues. The suggestion of working groups within a new inter-sessional process was not explicitly opposed. The suggestion of inter-sessional meetings being empowered to take decisions was raised by some while others expressed caution about delegating such powers.

On developments in science and technology (S&T), there were numerous statements calling for a more regular review, suggesting five years between Review Conferences is too long, with some statements calling for annual meetings on the subject.

On peaceful uses of the life sciences/Article X there were calls within many statements, primarily those from NAM countries, for better implementation and the desire for an implementation mechanism of some form. Some statements from Western countries recounted activities carried out that were relevant to Article X. It was noted many times that capacities to deal with infectious disease have benefits for humanity against both naturally occurring and deliberately induced disease.

On Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), more statements mentioned the potential for simplifications of the CBM forms to make them easier to fill in, and therefore less burdensome on governments, than mentioned revisiting what should be reported within the CBM arrangements. Some statements noted that while CBMs can be used to build trust, they are not the same as a compliance system and cannot be used to judge compliance.

In relation to compliance/verification issues there were many calls for legally binding measures of one form or another. Some statements recognised such measures could not be negotiated immediately but indicated an interest to have the 'importance' of negotiations reflected in the final document. Some statements took a pragmatic approach in trying to work on what might be achievable in the foreseeable future. Many statements encouraged enhanced national implementation of the Convention's provisions.

On universality, there were statements of regret that the Convention did not have more States Parties and many messages of welcome to the most recent countries to join – Mozambique and Burundi. Some statements made reference to efforts undertaken to encourage specific countries to join. In relation to the conference to be held in 2012 on the possibilities for a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, there were a few calls for countries in the region that were not already parties to the BWC to join before that conference.

Side Events

Three side events were held on Tuesday. The first, held in the breakfast slot, was entitled 'Germ Gambits: Lessons for BWC Compliance Drawn from the UNSCOM Inspections in Iraq'. A presentation was given by Amy Smithson (James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies), based on her book 'Germ Gambits: The Bioweapons Dilemma, Iraq and Beyond'.

Two side events were held during the lunch break. One consisted of back-to-back presentations; the first set of which were organized by the Inter-Academy Panel (The Global Network of Science Academies) on the report that resulted from a 2010 workshop in Beijing on trends in science and technology issues. A presentation on the report was given by Rod Flower, with panelists Ralf Trapp (consultant) and Katherine Bowman (US National Academy of Sciences) and Andrej Gorski (Polish Academy of Sciences) in the chair. The report is available from <<http://www.nap.edu>>. This was immediately followed by the launch of the University of Bradford report on 'Key Points for the Seventh Review Conference'. Short presentations were given by Kathryn Nixdorff (INES), Nicholas Sims (LSE), Malcolm Dando (Bradford), Graham Pearson (Bradford), Filippa Lentzos (LSE) and Angela Woodward (VERTIC). The report is available from <<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/sbtwc>>.

The other lunchtime event was convened by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael <<http://www.clingendael.nl/>> on their new book 'The Future of Biological Weapons Revisited'. Presentations were given by the authors, Koos van der Bruggen and Barend ter Haar on developments since the first edition of the book in 1991.

This is the third report from the Seventh Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) which is being held from 5 to 22 December 2011 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies of these reports and those from the earlier meetings are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

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