

Wednesday 14th December 2011

The halfway point: the start of facilitated consultations

The Seventh Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) reached its halfway point on Tuesday night.

The morning started with two additional general debate statements from the Deputy Minister of Justice of Afghanistan and from the World Health Organization.

After these statements, the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands), informed the Conference that three facilitators were being appointed to examine and consult on particular issue areas. Paul Wilson (Australia) would deal with Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) forms and Zahid Rastam (Malaysia) would cover the review of scientific and technological developments. The third position, to facilitate on assistance and cooperation issues, was initially not announced and in the afternoon it became known that this role would be taken by Gary Domingo (Philippines). In order to keep up with the aspiration to be able to circulate a draft of the final document on Thursday or Friday, the facilitators were tasked to report back to the President with initial results by Wednesday evening. Facilitators were asked by the President to act in a transparent manner and to be sensitive to the needs of smaller delegations. It was widely recognized that these facilitators faced a challenging task.

The Chair of the Credentials Committee, Mário Duarte (Portugal), noted that only a relatively small proportion of formal credentials had been submitted for consideration. Taking a cue from Monday's Article XIV discussion, he 'urged' rather than 'encouraged' delegates to submit these promptly.

The rest of the morning saw the completion of the first reading within the Committee of the Whole with a final informal plenary session in the afternoon. This brought to a close the phase of the Conference which was the exchange of views without coming to conclusions. The Conference is starting to negotiate and consult on specific aspects of language that might appear in the final documentation. Some of this is happening in bilaterals and other small groups as well through the facilitators appointed by the President. The non-aligned (NAM) group of States Parties is holding meetings twice a day, although there is little printed output from these sessions. No particular outcome from the Review Conference is guaranteed at this time, but the Conference remains on schedule.

Article-by-article review / Committee of the Whole

The article-by-article review continued in the Committee of the Whole with the first reading of the 'Solemn declaration' which covers the preambular paragraphs of the Convention and which immediately precedes the article-by-article review.

Using the equivalent paragraphs from the Sixth Review Conference as the starting point, some minor changes were proposed and were unopposed relating to consistency of the text and references to use of weapons. A significant time was taken with consideration of

whether there should be a reference to UN Security Council resolution 1540 in paragraph (vii) which relates to terrorism. One perspective was that there were a number of significant UN resolutions relating to terrorism and that at least some others should be mentioned, or perhaps simply a general wording such as '1540 and other relevant UN resolutions'. Some delegates noted the difference in legal status between resolutions from the Security Council and those from the General Assembly and wished this to be reflected in any wording. Proposals were made for the insertion of additional paragraphs, these will be considered later.

Informal plenary topics – Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and 'Any Other Issues'

Two subjects were under discussion in the informal plenary on Tuesday afternoon: the ISU and any other issues not covered in any of the other cross-cutting sessions. As with the earlier sessions, the aim was not to come to any immediate conclusions, but to encourage discussion.

Key starting points for the discussion on the ISU were the working papers by Germany (WP.15), South Africa (WP.17) and Japan (WP.22). Key issues that came up in the discussion included: what tasks should be allocated to the ISU; what size should it be; how it should be funded; and how the budget should be decided.

All delegations that contributed to this discussion made favourable comments about the ISU and none called for the mandate to be allowed to expire. Some representatives stated that the ISU was an administrative body only while others noted that even administrative actions could have political significance. The final decision on the ISU will be dependent on what form the new inter-sessional process will take as this will be a significant influence on its tasking. As the final package that allows for a decision might be made quite late, there is a likelihood that the Review Conference will calculate the ISU budget at the last minute, with all the potential for errors that brings. South Africa proposed that the Review Conference should only decide on an interim budget and agree the final budget at the 2012 Meeting of States Parties. This did not meet with universal approval.

Under 'Any Other Issues' there was only one topic raised. This was an informal paper circulated by Switzerland about dual-use education and awareness. This derived, in part, from the cross-regional working paper on the subject (WP.20/Rev.1).

Side Events

Three side events were held on Tuesday – one in the morning and two at lunchtime. The morning event was convened by the delegation of the United States of America. The event was introduced by Ambassador Laura Kennedy (USA) and presentations were given by Isabelle Nuttall (World Health Organization), Gregor Malich (International Committee of the Red Cross), George Korch (US Department of Health and Human Services), Scott Dowell (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and Nance Kylvoh (US Agency for International Development).

One lunchtime event was convened by the World Health Organization (WHO) <<http://www.who.int>> on 'Global Capacities, Alert and Response'. Presentations were given by Keiji Fukuda, Isabelle Nuttall, Stella Chungong and Maurizio Barbeschi, all of the WHO. The other was on 'Regional Dialogue and Exchange on Biological Safety and Security in the Middle East and North Africa' that drew from activities of an informal working group of technical experts discussing the technical parameters of a regional framework on biological safety and security. Presentations were given by Maurizio Martellini (Landau Network - Centro Volta), Nisreen Al Hmoud (Royal Scientific Society, Jordan) and David Friedman (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel).

This is the eighth report from the Seventh Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention 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>>.

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