

Monday 19th December 2011

## Second Week Completed: draft final document under discussion

The Seventh Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) ended its second week on Friday with draft text for two of the main elements of the final document in front of it – the article-by-article review and the forward looking section, both described below.

The atmosphere is less positive than it has been, but it would be incorrect to describe it as negative. There are drafts of most of the Final Document now circulating, but many details are yet to be resolved such as the structure and topics of the meetings to be held in the years before the next Review Conference – the inter-sessional process.

There are four full working days left in the Review Conference which may seem a lot, but it is not long in diplomatic terms. The pressure of time has led some delegates to take time out at the weekend to engage in informal contacts to try to resolve some of the outstanding issues. The tasks before the Review Conference are not impossible to complete in the time remaining but this will be challenging.

### **Adoption of Committee of the Whole report**

Friday started with a meeting of the Committee of the Whole with Ambassador Desra Percaya (Indonesia) in the chair. Ambassador Percaya presented the meeting with the outline of the article-by-article review that would be transmitted back to the Review Conference proper. This document bore the reference BWC/CONF.VIII/COW/CRP.2. The Chair described the paper as his best attempt to identify what would constitute a consensus text and acknowledged that the text would probably not make anyone happy – indeed he was not happy! He summarised his task as making everyone equally unhappy as some positions were impossible to combine and so some guesswork had to be used in order to try to find middle ground. Where middle ground was hard to spot, text from the Sixth Review Conference was used as this had been agreed by consensus.

Ambassador Percaya encouraged delegates to read the text carefully over the weekend so as to bring thoughts back for the final week of the Review Conference. Before the adoption of the report, it was noted that the Solemn declaration was not included in the draft. Later in the day a facilitator was appointed to help finalize the Solemn declaration.

Immediately after the Committee of the Whole had adopted its report, the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands), resumed the plenary in order to ‘take note’ of the Committee’s report.

The article-by-article text in the Committee’s report is not set in stone and is certain to be revised by the Review Conference.

### **First draft of the forward-looking section – decisions and recommendations**

After the adoption of the Committee of the Whole report, the President of the Review Conference circulated his first draft of the forward looking part of the Final Document within the room (BWC/CONF.VII/CRP.1). The President described the report as deriving from the

thematic informal plenaries and the work of the facilitators. He acknowledged that this was a complex document with many interlinking issues. For example, the document included suggestions for four annual topics for the period 2012-15 with three proposed 'open-ended working groups' (OEWGs) on science and technology issues; cooperation and assistance and national implementation. In order to accommodate the OEWGs, the Meeting of Experts would be increased to two weeks. To take on extra support for meetings, amongst other things, the staffing of the Implementation Support Unit would be increased from three to five. A mechanism to facilitate provision of assistance under Article X is proposed, formulated in such a way as not to provoke reaction from countries previously opposed to such a mechanism. One of the proposed annual topics included the word 'verifying' which prompted an immediate negative response from the US Ambassador. Once the document was circulated, the informal plenary was suspended until the afternoon for delegates to have a chance to read the paper and to consider it in conjunction with the article-by-article review.

After lunch, the first topic under discussion was the overall structure of the document. The informal plenary then moved on to discuss the new inter-sessional process. There was an overall acceptance that the draft provided a sound basis for work but that there was still much to be done.

Some States Parties raised questions about how the two-week Meeting of Experts would fit in with the OEWGs. If an expert was involved in only one OEWG would they have to travel all the way to Geneva for only one or two days work? As one delegate put it, if it became expensive to send too many experts to Geneva, States Parties would fall back on their staff already in the city and this would defeat the purpose of the Meeting of Experts. The structure of the meetings was seen as complex and it was clear that different people in the room had different ideas on how this might operate – therefore it is likely to take some further exchanges of ideas before a consensus emerges.

There was a suggestion that perhaps a facilitator be appointed to help formulate the topics. Many delegates noted that getting the topics for each year to complement the on-going topics will be important.

### **Facilitated consultations**

At least some of the facilitated consultations remain ongoing, with results being combined into the President's forward-looking paper or circulated to delegations in other forms. As with other aspects of the discussions of outstanding issues within the draft Final Document some of the results so far are interim and there is limited time to resolve all of the issues.

Towards the close of the day's proceedings it was announced that Ambassador Alexandre Fasel (Switzerland) had been appointed as facilitator for the Solemn declaration.

### **Side Events**

Two side events were held on Friday. The morning event was convened by the Ferdous International Foundation (FIF) <<http://www.ferdous.ch>> and the Global Health and Security Consultants (GHSC) on 'National Biological Risk Management Programme'. Presentations were given by Piers Millett (ISU), Ali Mohammadi (FIF/GHSC), and Abeer Sirawan (Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon) [on behalf of Suleiman Al-Buseidi (Reference Laboratory, Oman)]. Tim Trevan (International Council for the Life Sciences [ICLS]) chaired the event.

The lunchtime side event was convened by the ICLS <<http://www.icslcharter.org>> on the Biosafety and Biosecurity International Conference Process. The panellists were Tim Trevan, Nisreen Al Hmoud (Royal Scientific Society, Jordan), Abeer Sirawan and Ali Mohammadi. Details of the 2011 conference can be found at <<http://www.bbic-2011.org/>>.

*This is the eleventh 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.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>.*