

Tuesday 21st August 2007

## 2007 Meeting of Experts: The opening day

The opening day of the Meeting of Experts (MX) for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) included plenary statements by States Parties, a presentation by an international organization, statements by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activities by the new Implementation Support Unit (ISU). It was also confirmed during the day that Gabon had become the 159th State Party to the Convention.

### **Opening of the meeting**

The MX opened as scheduled on Monday morning, with Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan) in the Chair. A number of formalities were quickly run through, such as the adoption of the programme of work and the rules of procedure. Israel was granted observer status as a country that had neither signed nor ratified the BTWC. The African Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Interpol, the League of Arab States, and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons were granted observer status as international organizations.

Ambassador Khan noted that the MX had the benefit of building upon the success of the earlier inter-sessional process as well as the successful outcome of the Sixth Review Conference. Khan identified two types of presentation he expected to be made to the MX. The first would be detailing national experience in national implementation and in regional co-operation. The second would be thematic, such as ideas of how better cooperation may be achieved between national agencies. Khan indicated that, in keeping with past practice, a collated list of suggestions made during the meeting would be compiled and circulated with the factual report.

The general debate period in the morning consisted of plenary statements, in the following order, from Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Group), Portugal (on behalf of the European Union), Brazil, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea, India, Canada, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Libya, Indonesia and Sudan. Copies of each of the statements for which a paper copy was circulated at the meeting will be posted on the BWPP website at the address given overleaf. Some States Parties that would normally have given plenary statements at earlier MXs declined the opportunity this time in order to allow more time for detailed presentations on specific subjects.

A number of common themes emerged from the statements. Most emphasised the importance of the topics under discussion at the MX this year. Many noted that the nature of the biological issues meant that there were many benefits in learning from each other's experiences. Some expressed a continued desire to achieve, in the long term, some formal compliance measures of a legally-binding nature for the Convention. Several statements made reference to national systems of ensuring food safety, an area not traditionally associated with biological warfare but which is increasingly recognised as a potential area of terrorist or criminal activity in tampering with food supplies.

### **Interpol presentation**

After lunch, a presentation was given by Interpol on some of the work it has been carrying out on bioterrorism. Information was provided on the organization's activities in areas such as awareness raising regarding bioterrorism threats, police training, the strengthening of criminal law, and the creation of a 'bio-events' database. The Interpol bioterrorism website can be found at <<http://www.interpol.int/Public/BioTerrorism/>>.

Unlike the earlier plenary statements, this presentation was followed by a question and answer session. Issues brought up during this session included whether raising awareness of some threats was best achieved by the citation of certain types of press reporting and how the 'bio-events' database might relate to a database on 'biological incidents' that is to be set up by the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA) under General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/288. This second subject may become clearer later in the week when a presentation is due to be given by the ODA on its database.

### **NGO statements**

Following the Interpol presentation, the formal meeting was suspended to allow NGOs to make statements to an informal session. Statements were made, in the following order, by Bradford University, the Harvard Sussex Program (HSP), the London School of Economics (LSE), the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP), the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Scientists Working Group on Biological and Chemical Weapons, the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) and Pax Christi. Copies of each of these statements will be posted on the BWPP website at the address given below.

### **Implementation Support Unit activities**

The afternoon saw a demonstration of the ISU database on National Implementation Measures. The database contains short descriptions of national measures relevant to the Convention together, where possible, with links to the full texts. The database can be found via the ISU web page <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>> – click on 'Information for States Parties' and then 'National Implementation'. This leads to the list of countries on which data is held. As implementation measures have to be suitable for each national context, the database allows States Parties considering adopting new measures to refer to examples relevant to their circumstances.

During the evening a formal launch event for the ISU was held. However, the event was far from 'formal', providing a light-hearted counterpoint to the serious discussions of the day. The three staff of the ISU – Richard Lennane (Head), Piers Millett (Political Affairs Officer) and Ngoc Phuong Huynh (Associate Political Affairs Officer) – were introduced in a jovial presentation that included extracts from a 1952 civil defence film on biological warfare.

The ISU is unlike any other international body in arms control dealing with 'weapons of mass destruction'. In other cases, States Parties ask the international body to carry out actions on its behalf. By contrast, the ISU is essentially a co-ordination office, assisting States Parties in their own implementation activities and matching requests for assistance with relevant offers of help.

*This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 20 to 24 August 2007 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings.*

*The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of all of these reports (and details of how to subscribe to them by e-mail) are available on the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org/2007%20MX/MX2007Resources.html>>. This page also includes other materials from the meeting.*

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