

Wednesday 22nd August 2007

## 2007 Meeting of Experts: The second day

The second day of the Meeting of Experts (MX) for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) saw closed working sessions in the main meeting room and the first of the lunchtime side events.

The morning started with a shortened session as many delegates wished to attend the Conference on Disarmament (which also meets in the Palais des Nations), where Sergio de Queiroz Duarte, the UN Secretary-General's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, was speaking.

As the working sessions were held behind closed doors, it is not possible to give a comprehensive report on such activities.

Presentations given by States Parties were primarily on legislative issues. For example, detailed presentations were given on legal measures in India and the Philippines. Some presentations, such as one by Switzerland were very similar in character to statements made in the general debate the day before. Few presentations contained any surprises.

### **Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)**

The number of CBM returns submitted by BTWC States Parties so far in 2007 is a record 57 – beating 56 in 2006, which was itself a record. While the annual date for submission is in April, submissions are accepted by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) at any time of the year. With four months to go until the end of the year, the 2007 total is likely to grow.

Of the submissions so far in 2007, 48 were from states that had provided returns during 2006. Three returns were received from States Parties that had never previously submitted – Brunei Darussalam, Lebanon and Nigeria. Six States Parties submitted returns in 2007 that had previously done so, but not in 2006 – Bangladesh (previous return in 1996), Ecuador (1996), Jordan (1996), Kyrgyzstan (1993), Mexico (2004) and Turkey (2005).

Countries which submitted a CBM return in 2006, but have not yet done so in 2007 are Denmark, Greece, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Montenegro, Romania and San Marino.

In their plenary statement in the general debate on Monday, the European Union noted that all member states had submitted CBM returns in 2006. Thus far in 2007, out of the 27 member states of the EU, only Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg and Romania have yet to submit their returns. Of the 14 countries that had associated themselves with the EU statement, 7 – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – have yet to submit a CBM return in 2007. Albania and the Republic of Moldova have never previously submitted returns.

According to information on the website of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), the restricted area of the website that is to hold CBM returns in a secure manner went live in July.

## **BioWeapons Monitor launched**

The first lunchtime side-event of the Meeting of Experts was the launch of the second version of the BioWeapons Monitor by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP).

The goal of the BioWeapons Monitor is to set up a centralized repository of public documents relating to the norm against biological and chemical weapons. The documents pertain to treaties, negotiations and meetings of the States Parties, as well as UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, historical documents, NGO statements, and so forth.

Access to the BioWeapons Monitor is free. A fundamental underlying principle of the initiative is that access to information should not be dependent on institutional or private wealth. It has also been designed with speed of access to the information in mind so that users in countries with difficult or slow Internet connections can equally make use of it.

The BioWeapons Monitor can be found at <<http://www.bwpp.org/bwm>>.

## **Some personal reflections**

Observing international diplomacy for too many years can make even the most optimistic commentator cynical about what may be achieved in inter-governmental meetings. While the role of a commentator should be to try to report what is happening in an impartial manner, there are times that this style of reporting does not convey some of the atmosphere of meetings.

Something has changed. This year's MX has a clearly positive, collegial atmosphere. Perhaps the previous inter-sessional process was so closely tied with fears of failure at the 2006 Review Conference that delegates would stay closely within self-imposed parameters. Speaking with delegates from a diverse range of countries, I get the strong impression from a large number of them of increased flexibility and strong personal desires to 'do the right thing' in the biological field. The difficulty is that it is not clear in most situations precisely what the 'right thing' should be. Some contributory factors to this difficulty have been recognised for some time, such as the technical nature of the subject matter, the requirements to tailor implementation measures to national contexts, and the uncertainties of where future scientific and technological progress may lead. Even when particular measures can be identified as appropriate for a State Party, the factor most neglected is the variety of pressures that individual government officials are under.

It takes a certain level of self-confidence to be the individual within a government promoting new detailed implementation measures. The proposals will be remembered by your colleagues as having come from you. If you are not sure of the consequences of every detail of what you propose, do you have the confidence to keep pushing?

Perhaps a key, but immeasurable, element that will result from the Meeting of Experts will be the increased self-confidence felt by individual officials dealing with this subject matter.

*This is the third 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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