

Friday, 24th August 2007

## 2007 Meeting of Experts: The fourth day

The Meeting of Experts (MX) for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), met on Thursday morning in a closed working session to hear the last of the presentations. There was no meeting in the afternoon.

### **Draft report**

A draft text for the report from the MX was circulated to States Parties, most of which was regarded as fairly uncontentious. As in previous years, the paragraph relating to the compiled list of proposals is the one for which some States Parties have the greatest difficulty. The text for this paragraph, as circulated in draft, is taken from the 2005 MX report (a combination of paras. 18 and 19 of BWC/MSP/2005/MX/3 – the draft even retains the date of 2005 in it!) Some States Parties have concerns about the status of the compiled list of proposals and this paragraph essentially says it has no status as a formal inter-governmental document.

### **Expectations**

As there is little that is contentious in the subject matter being discussed at this MX, it is likely that the proceedings will be wrapped up formally on Friday in a short meeting.

In the past, two States Parties have most been involved in delays reaching agreement on final reports in previous inter-sessional process meetings – Iran and the United States. Often each has been reacting to the statements of the other. This year, both seem to be content with the proceedings.

Neither would find much benefit in raising objections at this stage. On the US side, national implementation is something it has been focussed on in recent years and there has been much comment in the corridors about the positive US attitude at this MX. An issue which has not received much attention in Geneva, but has received much in The Hague, is the Iranian candidacy for the Chairmanship of the Second Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which is to be held next year. It is the turn of the Asian Group to hold this position and Iran is hoping to get the support of the group for its candidacy. This might be an influence on Iranian activities.

### **Biological incidents database presentation**

A presentation on the United Nations biological incidents database was given at lunchtime – the second side event of the week. The database is to be set up by the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA) under General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/288 which was adopted by consensus in 2006. As the requirements for the database were unspecified in the

resolution other than it should be comprehensive yet complementary to the biocrimes database being established by Interpol (see *MX report #2*).

The presentation by the ODA highlighted some of the work to date to develop the database. The working definition of 'biological incident' that is in use is an 'event in which a biological agent harms or threatens to harm humans, livestock, agricultural or economic assets'. This therefore includes accidental as well as deliberate events. No specific definition of 'biological agent' is being used.

A large part of the question and answer session dealt with issues of how hoaxes might be dealt with in the database. One side of the issue is whether hoax events, which by definition do not involve actual biological agents, should be included – especially as there are many, many times more hoaxes than real events and this can distort the numbers. The other side is that some lessons may be learnt from how hoaxes are dealt with and that hoaxes may not threaten harm through disease but can create economic harm through the disruption they cause.

Following the presentation, the relationship between the ODA and Interpol databases was not much clearer. However, this is mostly due to the early stage in development that each of them is at. In corridor discussions, some delegates raised concerns about having to provide the same information twice to the separate databases.

### **Confidence-Building Measures – 58 and counting ...**

The Implementation Support Unit has confirmed this week that Denmark has submitted its 2007 CBM return, bringing the total up to 58 and continuing to build on the record levels of submission.

This leaves seven States Parties as having submitted a CBM return in 2006 but not so far during 2007 (see *MX report #3*).

*This is the fifth 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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