

Wednesday 22nd November 2006

The end of the beginning: Completion of the opening statements

The second day of the Sixth five-yearly Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) brought the general debate to an end and the convening of the Committee of the Whole (CoW) which is to carry out an article-by-article review of the Convention. Most Review Conferences, both for the BTWC and similar international treaties, can be divided into a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning is the public statements, the overt expressions of policy that may include indications of what States Parties will or will not want from the Conference. The middle is the discussion behind closed doors between States Parties on various more specific aspects of the Convention and the assembling of text that might form part of the output from the Conference. The end is the effort to resolve outstanding issues in order to produce a consensus conclusion.

The beginning of this Review Conference has shown there is substantial common ground on which States Parties could describe an outcome to be 'positive' or 'successful'.

The General Debate

Following the 31 presentations given by States Parties on Monday, a number of statements were made by states, by inter-governmental organizations and UN specialized agencies, and by non-governmental organizations. For practical reasons statements from these separate groupings were not all taken together, but for analytical purposes they are considered together here. Copies of statements, where available, have been scanned and placed on the BWPP website, see <<http://www.bwpp.org/6RevCon/6thRevConResources.html>>.

Statements by States Parties and Signatory States

Statements were made on Tuesday by the States Parties on Tuesday in the following order: Nigeria, New Zealand, France, Venezuela, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Mexico. Of the Signatory States present, Syria requested the floor for a right of reply and Egypt made a general statement.

Most of these statements followed the pattern of those on Monday by discussing general issues such as universality and national implementation. France spoke of the efforts by France and Switzerland to encourage States to lift their remaining reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Venezuela spoke of the balances needed in regulation between the prevention of misuse and the promotion of beneficial use of the life sciences. Sudan noted it was introducing new legislation to parliament to implement the BTWC. Thailand described its domestic arrangements for implementation which include a 'BWC Coordinating Committee'.

Syria's used its right of reply to deny the allegations made by the US on Monday (see Report #1). Egypt connected its non-ratification of the BTWC with Israel's non-signature to the Convention and that country's alleged possession of nuclear weapons..

Statements by IGOs and agencies

Inter-governmental organizations and UN specialized agencies made statements in the following order: International Committee of the Red Cross, Interpol, OIE [World Organization for Animal Health], Food and Agriculture Organization, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization.

The Red Cross spoke of the need to create a 'culture of responsibility' within the scientific community. The other statements focused on how the operational activities of the relevant organizations overlapped with issues within the remit of the BTWC.

Statements by NGOs

NGOs made statements to an informal plenary session in the following order: University of Bradford, International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility, Verification Research Training and Information Centre, Friends World Committee for Consultation, London School of Economics, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Pax Christi International, Arms Control Association, Pugwash, Landau Network-Centro Volta, TriValley Cares, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Research Group for Biological Arms Control (University of Hamburg), BWPP, Center for Biosecurity (University of Pittsburgh), Institute for Security Studies.

Committee of the Whole

The CoW was convened under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Doru Costea (Romania) late in the afternoon as the statements in plenary session had finished earlier than expected. Some States Parties and groups of States Parties had scheduled their consultations on the basis that the CoW would start on Wednesday morning and this impacted on the discussion.

The CoW is to carry out an article-by-article review and the first sessions are allocated to consider Articles I to IV. Some States Parties wish to cover these four articles at the same time while others wish to deal with the articles individually.

A large part of the CoW activity on Tuesday afternoon seems to have been focused on whether 'use' was covered by the Convention or not. All but one States Parties that expressed a view on this appear to be of the understanding that a prohibition of use of biological weapons is implicit within the Convention.

US press conference

The leader of the US delegation, Assistant Secretary of State John C. Rood, gave a press conference about the US perspective on the Review Conference on Monday evening. A transcript is available at <<http://www.usmission.ch/Press2006/1120RoodPress.html>>.

NGO activities

Tuesday's lunchtime seminar was by the Royal Society, the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the InterAcademy Panel on International Issues (IAP) and discussed the outcomes from an 'International Workshop on Science and Technology Developments Relevant to the BTWC' held in London in September. The workshop report and supporting papers are available at <<http://www.royalsociety.ac.uk/document.asp?tip=0&id=5563>>

This is the third report from the Sixth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 20 November to 8 December 2006 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP).

These reports are available on the BWPP website via a page dedicated to the Review Conference – <<http://www.bwpp.org/6RevCon/6thRevConResources.html>>. Details of how to subscribe to the reports via e-mail are included there.

For press queries or any other questions relating to the Review Conference, please contact Dr Jean Pascal Zanders (+41-79-582 4454 or <jpzanders@bwpp.org>). For technical questions relating to these reports Richard Guthrie can be contacted during the Review Conference by e-mail at <rguthrie@bwpp.org>.