

Thursday 23rd November 2006

## CoW racing: Heading in the same direction?

The third day of the Sixth five-yearly Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) was dominated by proceedings in the Committee of the Whole (CoW).

### **Committee of the Whole**

The task for the CoW is to carry out an article-by-article review of the Convention. During Wednesday, the CoW proceeded at a substantial rate. Wednesday's morning session had been allocated to consider Articles I to IV, but by lunchtime the CoW had covered Articles V and VI and was into Articles VII to X. By the end of the afternoon session, Article XII was under consideration.

This rate of activity is down to the apparent decision to take the early meetings of the CoW to be an expression of views relating to each article, rather than an attempt to reach consensus yet. With all proposals for language to describe how the Conference views the operation of each article on the table at an early stage there would be a chance for considered reflection on all of the issues. However, there are many proposals missing.

The working papers by the Latin American States before the Review Conference are essentially bullet point statements, the text of which may be considered proposals for language to be included in the Review. The European Union and the United States have circulated proposals for a number of the articles. It is not clear at this stage whether the JACKSNNZ will be proposing text. The BTWC group of non-aligned States, often referred to as 'NAM' for short but whose membership is not quite identical to the Non-Aligned Movement, clearly have a desire to present language proposals but do not appear to be in a position to do so yet. The BTWC NAM group had already experienced delays in bringing forward nominations for various formal positions within the Review Conference, such as for Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

CoWs in any Review Conference, just like herds of their animal namesakes, can be quite difficult to keep together travelling down the same path. The language proposals so far have been similar in a number of general aspects and, although there are differences, none would seem to be substantial. Only time will tell whether further language proposals will follow this pattern.

### **Reflections on the Review Conference so far**

The current situation has similarities with the time around the opening of the Review Conference. Statements from a number of key states were keenly awaited. Working papers submitted beforehand indicated the positions of the European Union, the Latin American States and the JACKSNNZ. While anticipation for the statement from the United States gathered most attention, there was also great interest in statements from other States – such as China, India and Russia – as it was not clear precisely what positions would be taken by these States as their were a number of internal consultations taking place.

The issue of use of biological weapons continues to be aired. Iran expresses the view that the provisions against use within the 1925 Geneva Protocol are not strong enough. As a country attacked with chemical weapons by a State Party to the Geneva Protocol it wishes to amend the BTWC to ensure such provisions against the use of biological weapons are strengthened. Other States Parties do not believe that amending the treaty would strengthen the legal situation. A background document on the history of discussions relating to use in the negotiation of the BTWC has been posted on the BWPP website and can be accessed via <http://www.bwpp.org/6RevCon/BWPPcontributions.html>.

### **NGO activities**

A lunchtime seminar was convened by the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), the Harvard Sussex Program (HSP) and the Verification Research Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) to promote their ‘Briefing Book’ – a collection of documents intended to aid delegates to the Review Conference. The publication can be found at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/spru/hsp/Briefing%20Book.htm>.

The seminar also promoted a new VERTIC report, ‘A New Strategy: Strengthening the Biological Weapons Regime through Modular Mechanisms’ which can be found at <http://www.vertic.org/publications/VM6.pdf>.

*This is the fourth 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.*

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