

Friday 1st December 2006

An outbreak of clusters

Thursday, the ninth day of the Sixth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), saw the completion of work and adoption of the report of the Committee of the Whole (CoW) and the breakout into clusters dealing with specific parts of the text for the final declaration.

Work on the final declaration

The report of the CoW was adopted in a brief open plenary in the middle of the morning that was convened after a short, final meeting of the CoW. The report was introduced to the plenary by the Chairman of the CoW, Ambassador Doru Costea (Romania) and included the draft declaration text as circulated on Wednesday. The President of the Review Conference, Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan) described the efforts of the CoW as a 'sound basis' on which to complete the work of the Conference.

During the plenary, the President announced that there would be four clusters to meet in sequence. The work was divided along the following lines: Articles I to IV [to be co-ordinated by Ambassador Costea], Articles V to VII [Mr Knut Langeland (Norway)], Articles VIII to IX [Mr Shahrul Yaakob (Malaysia)], and Article X [Dr Ben Steyn (South Africa)]. These clusters are expected to meet until Friday lunchtime.

Other informal groupings (IG) have been assigned subject areas to explore possible text that could be used for the final declaration but that do not fall easily within an article-by-article analysis of the Convention. The first two of these, given the tags 'IG-1' and 'IG-2' have reported on the subjects of an implementation support unit (ISU) and on the inter-sessional process 2003-05 as noted in report # 9. The other subject groups are universality (IG-3), national implementation (IG-4), the inter-sessional process 2007-10 (IG-5) and Confidence-Building Measures (IG-6).

Possible topics for the future inter-sessional process

The President of the Review Conference circulated a paper on Wednesday to States Parties with eleven possible topics for meetings in 2007-10:

- i 'Ways and means to enhance national implementation: including enforcement of national legislation and strengthening of national institutions, and cooperation between courts, police and customs'.
- ii 'Regional and sub-regional cooperation on BWC implementation'.
- iii 'National, regional and international measures to improve biosafety and biosecurity, including laboratory safety and security of pathogens and toxins'.
- iv 'Education, awareness-raising, scientific oversight and codes of conduct'.
- v 'Advances in science and technology relevant to the Convention, including prevention of misuse of such advances for illicit or hostile purposes as prohibited by the Convention'.
- vi 'Facilitation of, and removal of restrictions or limitations on, scientific and technological cooperation and exchange, including in the field of biotechnology, for peaceful purposes in pursuance of Article X'.

- vii 'Disease surveillance, including international cooperation in improving primary healthcare systems and improving detection and diagnostic capabilities'.
- viii 'Preparedness and response in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, whether by state or non-state actors, including provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations, in accordance with Article VII'.
- ix 'Confidence-building measures, including provision of assistance to States Parties on request'.
- x 'Terms and definitions relevant to the Convention'.
- xi 'Bioterrorism and non-state actors'.

A selection will have to be made from the above list and elements of some topics may be combined. One method of doing this is for States Parties to indicate which items they are least in favour of. For example, the United States is understood to have raised objections in relation to items vi and x, while Iran has raised objections in relation to item viii.

NGO activities

Thursday's lunchtime seminar was convened by the Biological Threat Reduction project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, on the topic of 'Governance for Biological Threat Reduction: a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, international approach'. Further information about the project can be found at <<http://www.csis.org/hs/btr/>>.

Bowled over

The alternative BWC – the 'Bowling World Cup' – was hosted by Malaysia, the Netherlands and Switzerland at a Geneva bowling alley on Thursday evening. Participants played two games each with prizes being awarded for the highest individual game score and for the highest overall score. The prize for highest scoring woman in an individual game went to Britta Häggström (Sweden) with the prize for highest overall score going to Una Becker (Germany). In the men's categories, both prizes went to Wan Yusri (Malaysia).

The Bowling World Cup started around 1998 and had been continued through various Convention meetings until the political stalemates of 2001. Perhaps the most optimistic sign that a positive outcome might be achieved at the 2006 Review Conference is the resurrection of this venerable tradition.

Back issues of the RevCon reports

Many delegations in Geneva have requested back issues of these reports which we have been more than happy to supply. With the large number of issues now published, it would be appreciated if, where possible, delegates could download the files from the BWPP website <www.bwpp.org> – click on the link marked '**BTWC Review Conference Resource Pages**'.

While the primary purpose of these reports is to inform people who are unable to attend the Review Conference in Geneva, it is pleasing that so many diplomats and government experts have found them useful.

This is the tenth report from the Sixth five-yearly 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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