

Wednesday 6th December 2006

## Working towards a conclusion: More text agreed

Tuesday, the twelfth day of the Sixth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), saw the continuation of informal plenaries and consultations on outstanding issues relating to the draft final declaration – a new version of which was circulated during the morning. All the meetings of the Review Conference so far this week have taken place behind closed doors.

The expected late session of consultations did not take place and it now looks increasingly likely the Review Conference will continue discussions all the way to Friday.

### **Textual discussions**

A new draft declaration was circulated during the morning to States Parties by the President of the Review Conference, Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan), following up the text circulated by him on Friday. This version has fewer instances of bolded text [i.e., text that has yet to be agreed] than the earlier one.

Further discussion during the day resolved a number of additional textual matters. The major items relating to Article X (regarding peaceful uses of biological sciences) and the next inter-sessional process remain the most difficult unresolved issues.

A sentence proposed in bold for the text relating to the Preamble of the Convention may prove difficult to rephrase as it talks of the ‘enduring value of previous Final Declarations’. As these earlier declarations made references to possible multilateral verification arrangements, some States will not want to refer back to these. However, these declarations also refer to a number of other understandings not reflected in the current draft declaration which States will want to refer back to.

The other outstanding issues appear resolvable given time and a certain amount of negotiation.

### *Action plans and Article X*

During the afternoon, the President circulated a proposal for a single action plan on ‘comprehensive national implementation’ – combining elements of the proposed action plans on national implementation and on implementation of Article X. This first united action plan was followed by a later one which took into account comments made on the earlier draft.

The action plan on national implementation proposal made some days ago in outline form seemed to gather a broad range of support unlike the separate proposal for an action plan on implementation of Article X which appeared to be supported by a number of States Parties but opposed by others. The latest proposal looks like a package put together, including selected elements of each plan, as an attempt to satisfy the various viewpoints and, in so-doing, achieve consensus.

#### *The future inter-sessional process*

One item has been removed from the earlier list of possible topics for the inter-sessional process 2007-10. 'Bioterrorism and non-state actors' (which had been listed as item xi) does not appear in Tuesday morning's draft declaration text. This leaves ten proposed topics on the list.

While the draft declaration is still couched in terms of two topics being discussed in each year, there is a growing realisation that a one week meeting of States Parties with a preparatory one week meeting of experts in each year is too short to deal with both topics in detail. As it has not yet been possible to reduce the number of topics down to eight (two per year over four years), setting a target to reduce this list even further is unrealistic.

Pressure on time within the proposed inter-sessional meetings is compounded as each year's meetings will possibly also cover a number of recurring topics – universality, national implementation, scientific and technological developments, and coordination with other international bodies. These are subjects considered to be better dealt with over a number of years as some form of progress report or update may be considered beneficial.

#### **Side events**

Tuesday's lunchtime seminar was convened by Interpol and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) to introduce the Interpol Bioterrorism Prevention Program and to present 'An [ACT, STATUTE, ORDINANCE, LAW] to prohibit biocrimes and to promote biosafety and biosecurity' – a draft legal text designed to assist States wishing to legislate against hostile uses of the biological sciences. Further information on Interpol activities in this field can be found at <[www.interpol.int/Public/BioTerrorism/links](http://www.interpol.int/Public/BioTerrorism/links)> and on VERTIC at <<http://www.vertic.org>>.

*This is the thirteenth 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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