

Tuesday 4th December 2018

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties: setting the scene

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) is the first in the current inter-sessional process to follow a series of Meetings of Experts (MXs). The Eighth five-yearly BWC Review Conference, held in 2016, had been unable to agree on a new work programme to be carried out in the years running up to the Ninth Review Conference, scheduled for 2021. As such work programmes run between sessions of the Review Conference they are known as the inter-sessional process or, sometimes, the inter-sessional work programme. The Eighth Review Conference delegated the 2017 MSP to take the decision on the inter-sessional process.

Financial pressures (see below) have meant that the MSP this year will be only 3 days in duration, holding formal meetings on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday of this week. Thursday will be used for informal consultations and will not be a formal day of the MSP. The Chair of the 2018 MSP is Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

The 2018 Meetings of Experts

A major agenda item for the MSP is: 'Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations, including possible outcomes'. The 2018 MXs, as decided at the 2017 MSP, held a year ago, were a continuation of the work programmes that were first established in 2002 but at the same time they represented a significant change in structure. The 2017 MSP agreed to the holding of five distinct MXs in each of 2018, 2019 and 2020. Each year would also include a week-long MSP towards the end of the calendar year. In summary, the MXs and their topics, as agreed by the 2017 MSP, and the Chairs appointed through subsequent consultations were:

- MX1 – (2 days) Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X – Ambassador Maria Teresa Almojuela (Philippines)
- MX2 – (2 days) MX2 - Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention – Pedro Luiz Dalcero (Brazil)
- MX3 – (1 day) Strengthening National Implementation – Ambassador Julio Herráiz España (Spain)
- MX4 – (2 days) Assistance, Response and Preparedness – Daniel Nord (Sweden)
- MX5 – (1 day) Institutional Strengthening of the Convention – Otakar Gorgol (Czech Republic)

The five separate meetings had a benefit of focusing the substantive work, but had limitations in making connections between topics dealt with in separate meetings. Having Chairs who need only focus on one topic spread the workload and enhanced the effectiveness of meetings. The official reports from each of the MXs were essentially procedural as the purpose of the MXs are to exchange ideas, innovations and perspectives rather than reach consensus positions. Each report was accompanied by a Chair's summary. At the time of writing, the BWC website has these in advance format.

BWC financial challenges

The financial uncertainties for the BWC create challenges that distract from the core purpose of the Convention – upholding the norm against acquisition or use of disease as a weapon. These financial uncertainties are caused by the late payment by governments of the assessed contributions that they had agreed to pay. New financial management arrangements within the UN system have meant that money cannot be committed until it has been received. Thus, late payments (or, even worse, no payment) make planning for meetings and agreement for staff contracts for the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), the small nucleus of staff to support the Convention, extremely difficult.

The financial situation is the direct cause of the MSP this week being of 3 days duration rather than the 4 that had been agreed at MSP 2017.

Monthly reports of received assessed contributions are posted to the BWC ISU website each month under the ‘latest information’ section. It would seem that, despite many prompts on the subject, many delegations (and governments) do not seem to have grasped the severity of the situation.

BWC membership

At the 2017 MSP, membership of the BWC stood at 179. On 9 January 2018 the State of Palestine deposited its instrument of accession to the BWC with the relevant authorities in Moscow and London, becoming the 180th member. On 14 June 2018 Niue deposited its instrument of accession to the BWC with the relevant authorities in Washington, DC, becoming the 181st member. On 25 September 2018, the Central African Republic deposited its instrument of ratification to the BWC with the relevant authorities in Washington, DC, becoming the 182nd member. During the year there were press reports that the United Republic of Tanzania made progress in its domestic requirements towards ratification. Universal membership of the Convention is a long-established aspiration and a number of activities have taken place since the 2017 MSP, such as regional workshops, to encourage and assist states that are not yet members to join.

MSP documentation

The agenda and an indicative schedule for the meeting have been published together with a number of working papers along with other materials such as the report on universalization activities. The annual report of the ISU is understood to be forthcoming. These can be found via the BWC ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>; official documents can also be found via the UN server <<http://documents.un.org>> (identifiers for official documents for this meeting all start BWC/MSP/2018/).

Global context

BWC meetings are sometimes affected by the global context. The Fourth Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) reached its conclusion without being able to agree a final report the Friday before the BWC MSP convenes. [Daily reports from the CWC can be found at <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>.] While there are a number of overlaps between the policy areas of chemical weapons and biological weapons, a key aspect of the divergence of views within the CWC was the question of how to handle allegations of use of chemical weapons (in a number of cases, the assessments of many governments was that some of these should be considered confirmed use). However, there are no similar allegations within the scope of the BWC.

This is the first report from the BWC Meeting of States Parties, being held from 4 to 7 December 2018 in Geneva. These reports have been produced for all official BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. An email subscription link is available on each page. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.

Wednesday 5th December 2018

Meeting of States Parties opening day: start of the general debate

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Tuesday morning with Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in the Chair. His first act was to give the floor to Russia which wanted to inform the Meeting that two of its diplomats had been stopped and searched when arriving at Geneva airport.

After some brief opening remarks from the Chair, the MSP was read a message from High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu who noted that the deliberate use of disease as a weapon is considered ‘universally repugnant and illegitimate’, that the Convention was ‘institutionally weak’ with no operational capacity to respond to biological attacks or provisions to verify compliance, and that the Convention needs financial stability. She wished the MSP well in its work to reach a substantive conclusion.

There were the usual opening formalities, such as adoption of the agenda and decisions on participation in the meeting.

In proposing the agenda, the Chair indicated he had received a request for an additional agenda item entitled ‘Organization of the work of the Meeting’ to be dealt with on Wednesday. The significance of this addition became clear when, during the Chair’s introduction to the general debate, Indonesia raised a point of order about why there were not two Vice-Chairs appointed, as had been the practice in recent years.

The process for selecting MSP Vice-Chairs is not clearly codified. The rules of procedure for the MSP are those for the Review Conference applied ‘mutatis mutandis’ [meaning applied with relevant changes for the application of the rules to the circumstances of the different type of meeting while still following the principles]. These rules allow for a large number of ‘Vice-President’ posts which are useful in a Review Conference context but not so in an MSP context. The Final Report of the resumed Fifth BWC Review Conference (2002) that established the first inter-sessional process simply noted that each MSP would have a Chair [BWC/CONF.V/17, para 18] and there were no Vice-Chairs. This continued until the Seventh Review Conference (2011) which decided ‘The annual Chair will be supported by two annual vice-chairs, one from each of the other two regional groups’ [BWC/CONF.VII/7, part III, para 11]. Similar language was agreed at the Eighth Review Conference. However, the Review Conferences provided no guidance on how Chairs and Vice-Chairs should be appointed. Recent practice has been for those in each regional group to decide amongst themselves their selection and for this to be subject to a ‘silence procedure’ by the states parties as a whole; meaning that such a selection is accepted by everyone unless an objection is raised. This process has not produced an outcome accepted by consensus this year, hence the request for a new agenda item. The Chair announced there would be informal consultations on this matter during Tuesday evening.

The general debate and themes raised

The general debate offers the chance for delegations to make plenary statements, individually or in a group, to outline their positions. Group statements were given by Venezuela (for the non-aligned [NAM] group), Russia (for a group of about a dozen like-

minded states) and Tunisia (for the Arab group). National statements were given by Germany, USA, Japan, Pakistan, Russia, Australia, Kuwait, Ireland, Norway, Kazakhstan, Costa Rica, Iraq, Netherlands, Switzerland, UAE, Thailand, India, Morocco, South Africa, China, Malaysia, Cuba, Philippines, Sweden, Colombia, Italy, Sri Lanka, Canada, Azerbaijan, Central African Republic, Montenegro, Belgium, Spain, Albania, Ukraine, Austria, Ecuador, Republic of Korea, Finland, Chile, France and Indonesia. With roughly two-thirds of those on the speakers list giving their statements on the opening day, it is possible to identify some themes and common threads. Many themes identifiable are those that have been raised at earlier meetings. The Central African Republic took the floor for the first time as a state party.

Universality – A number of statements referred to the benefits to the BWC of having universal membership. Many statements welcomed the three new states parties that joined the Convention during 2018 – State of Palestine, Niue and Central African Republic – and called for those countries not yet states parties to join the Convention.

Finances – Many statements noted that the root cause of the financial difficulties was the late payment of assessed contributions. Numerous calls were made for those states parties behind with payments to clear their arrears and, in future, to pay in full and pay on time. There were a number of expressions of support for some method to smooth cashflows such as a working capital fund. It was noted such a fund could be established through voluntary contributions, by placing any credits from future budgetary underspends into it or by putting arrears payments from past financial years into it. China noted that it had already paid its assessed contribution for 2019 to ease cashflow.

Meetings of Experts (MXs) – The MXs, held in August, were considered productive, with the overall impression given from statements that the MXs were viewed more positively than the previous MX arrangements.

Threat perceptions – There were a number of statements that talked about perceptions of threats. There were perceived threats from possible state programmes, from non-state actors/terrorists and from naturally occurring diseases. Lessons continue to be drawn from the outbreaks of Ebola Virus Disease in 2014 and subsequently.

Article VII & responses to disease outbreaks – There was a widespread recognition of a need for means to enable prompt assistance under Article VII. The Article VII database proposal from France and India continued to receive support. Connections were made with ‘one health’ policies where the issues of diseases in humans, animals and plants (including in agricultural contexts for the latter two of these) are considered interconnected and therefore require some common approaches. This last aspect was also tied in with questions of capacity building.

Other themes, to be covered in future daily reports if space permits, include Article X, capacity building, national implementation, scientific and technological developments and the BWC community.

Side events

Two side events were held at lunchtime. One, on ‘Transparency Initiatives: Strengthening Cooperation, Capacities and Confidence in Compliance’, was convened by Germany. The other, convened by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and Interpol, was on ‘Securing the present, protecting the future: Understanding, preventing and addressing the risk of misuse of CBRN science and technology by terrorist groups and other non-State actors’. One quirk of the financial limits on the MSP is that the side event convened by Germany was held in the plenary meeting room (Salle XVIII), as will be some of the side events later in the week.

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Thursday 6th December 2018

The second day of the MSP: general debate, vice-chairs and finances

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) resumed on Wednesday, starting with continuation and conclusion of the general debate which took most of the morning. This was interrupted to consider the challenging issue of the appointment of Vice-Chairs. Most of the afternoon was dedicated to financial matters, another set of challenging issues, followed by a brief follow-up discussion from the Meetings of Experts (MXs) in proceedings that will be continued on Thursday and so will be reported on as a whole.

The conclusion of the general debate – During the continuation of the general debate, national statements were given by Panama, Bulgaria, UK, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Belarus, Turkey, Latvia, Algeria, Sudan, Nepal, Mongolia, Iran, Angola, Argentina, Nigeria, Venezuela and Mexico. These were followed by Tanzania, Egypt and Haiti as signatory states; South Sudan as a non-state party; and the European Union and Interpol as international organizations. These were followed by a joint statement from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The MSP Chair, Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), indicated that time pressures that reduced NGO statements to one intervention should not be taken as a precedent. The other NGO statements will be posted to the BWC website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Themes identified here draw from statements on either Tuesday or Wednesday and should be read alongside the themes identified in the previous daily report. Space is tight here and so additional points may be highlighted if there is space in future reports.

National implementation – Regular review of implementation was stressed and developments in national situations were highlighted; for example Nigeria spoke of a new bill going through parliament and China referred to biosafety and biosecurity policy updates. A number of states referred to regional seminars they had organized or participated in; for example, Kazakhstan spoke to its working paper [WP.8] on a seminar in Almaty in October it had convened with Germany. Tanzania indicated that parliamentary proceedings in support of ratification had been completed and so deposit of an instrument of ratification was getting closer.

Article X – Earlier calls for more effective implementation of this Article were repeated, in similar language to that used previously, including suggestions that national implementation should not be used to introduce measures that add restrictions that inhibit transfers encouraged under Article X. Australia spoke to its working paper [WP.2] on structure and content of Article X reports. Examples of capacity building activities highlighted in statements include a Finland-Tanzania cooperation project and an EU-Mongolia project to enhance biosecurity training. Global Partnership countries spoke to their working paper [WP.9] on their activities under Article X.

The additional agenda item on organization of the MSP – The Chair introduced this with an explanation of how the situation regarding difficulties in appointing Vice-Chairs had arisen. He explained that, for the two positions, the Western group had nominated an

individual from the delegation of France, with no objections being raised, and that the NAM group had nominated an individual from the delegation of Venezuela, with one objection raised by the USA. Taking part in the exchanges under this agenda item were: Venezuela/NAM, Cuba, China, Russia, Indonesia, India, South Africa, Belarus, Iran, Philippines, Venezuela (national capacity), Russia and USA. A number of interventions suggested that it was inappropriate for external bilateral issues to impinge upon the procedures of the BWC. The USA indicated it had raised the objection for two reasons: the domestic political situation in Venezuela and that it was a country in financial arrears to the BWC. This prompted further comments from those who felt this objection unfair.

The decision taken was for there to be no Vice-Chairs for this year, but this was expressly indicated as not setting a precedent for years to come. It was also indicated that in taking this decision in order to allow time for substantive discussions to take place there would be future consideration of the process of appointments.

Financial matters – The Chair outlined two papers he had prepared relating to BWC finances – an information paper [BWC/MSP/2018/5] and elements of a decision [BWC/MSP/2018/CRP.1] that might be put forward for debate and possible adoption. The MSP also received a briefing from managers involved in administering UN support to the BWC: Clemens Adams, Director of Administration, UN Office at Geneva and Anja Kaspersen, Director, Geneva Branch, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. Taking part in discussion on these issues were: Venezuela/NAM, China, Mexico, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Latvia, Switzerland, Japan, France, Brazil, Philippines, USA, Russia, India, the European Union, Germany, UK, Iran, Venezuela (national capacity).

Two key problems were focused on. One is cash flow/liquidity caused by some payments arriving late in the year when it is hard to budget expenditures against them. The other, and more serious, is the cumulative debt problem caused by payments not being received at all. The current arrears stand at some \$236,000, some of which dates back a number of years. The cash flow situation could be made easier by creating a ‘liquidity reserve’ or ‘working capital fund’ to ease flows, but this would need additional funds to be put in place. There were some calls for such a fund to be generated from voluntary contributions (which would be faster) and some that it should be paid from assessed contributions (which would give states parties ‘ownership’ of the fund, but which could take longer to agree and certainly not be agreed this week). The more structural problem of non-payment was widely regarded as being more difficult to resolve. On average, only 90 per cent of assessed contributions were being received each year. One issue raised was that any solution might impose more costs on those who were in good standing as well as rewarding those who hadn’t paid. One suggestion from the Chair was that a ‘firm budget’ be adopted that assumed only 90 per cent of funding would be received and therefore planned around. This prompted some positive support but it was noted that those paying would only get 90 per cent of what they had paid for. Concerns were raised as to whether pressure would be put on those who hadn’t paid and whether such pressures would be unfair.

Side events – There were three on Wednesday. One, at breakfast, was convened by the InterAcademy Partnership, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Croatian Society for Biosafety and Biosecurity on ‘Governance of Dual Use Research in the Life Sciences: Advancing Global Consensus on Research Oversight’. Two, at lunchtime, were convened by the EU on ‘EU Council Decisions in support of the BWC’ and by Hamburg University on ‘Biorisk Assessment: Integrated Approaches for Understanding Complex Threats’.

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Friday 7th December 2018

Informal Thursday: reports from the Meetings of Experts

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) resumed on Thursday, but in a different location (room XXIV, usually used for side events, rather than the plenary room in use for the last few days, room XVIII). The underlying reason for this was financial and the move had been flagged in advance. One consequence was that interpretation services were not available and so the plenary was described as being informal. It was noted earlier in the week that this move would put some delegates at a disadvantage and, at a policy level, went against other efforts within multilateral institutions to promote multilingualism. Some delegates cited this in corridor discussions as a clear reason why the financial situation needs to be resolved.

The day started with a further discussion of financial issues before moving on to reports from the Chairs of each of the five Meetings of Experts (MXs) that had been held in August. These discussions were intended to help bring together elements of what had been discussed in each MX as a contribution to the final report for the MSP. The more intimate nature of the room led to a much more interactive discussion.

Further consideration of financial matters

The MSP Chair, Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), introduced a new version of his 'elements paper', taking into account feedback from the plenary discussion on Wednesday. He reiterated some points made then by delegations, such as a need to ensure that those that pay in full should not end up subsidising those that don't. The Chair reminded delegates that when financial decisions have to be taken by the UN, it is useful for the UN offices to have clarity about how the BWC states parties want things to be carried out. He offered to work on a way to communicate this. [*Note: The peculiar nature of the BWC and its operations within the UN can seem confusing. The BWC as a legal arrangement is sovereign, is not legally part of the UN and can take its own decisions. The highest level decision making body is the five-yearly Review Conference. However, for practical reasons it uses UN premises for meetings and employs staff through the UN. For the provision of these services, the BWC states parties collectively reimburse the UN. The BWC text is very short and has no reference to finances within it, so UN financial rules are followed.*]

The updated elements paper was shorter than the earlier iteration with more tightly focused phrasing. Most interventions in the discussion related to liquidity issues and the question of how a 'working capital fund' would be established and how it would be replenished when the funds within it had to be used.

Monthly reports of the financial situation, including details of arrears, are posted to the BWC ISU website under the 'latest information' section. The most recent figures are as of 30 November.

Reports from the Meetings of Experts

The agenda item for most of the day was 'Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations, including possible outcomes'. The main

parts of the reports from the MXs are procedural. Each report has an annex which contains a summary of discussion that is produced by the relevant MX Chair under their own authority and thus has no official status. The status of each annex is less important than its purpose -- to provide a record of the issues under discussion without drawing conclusions about where the balance on any particular set of issues lies. Overall, they are similar to the synthesis papers that had been produced after the earlier MXs in earlier work programmes. In addition, each MX Chair was asked by the MSP Chair to provide a conference room paper on what might be a contribution to the final report of the MSP and these were circulated earlier this week. Some MX Chairs also produced shorter papers that were circulated in the meeting room on Thursday to help focus discussion.

There were some common themes, such as how to build on the discussions in each MX in each year – this had been a weakness of the previous inter-sessional work programme (2012-15) in which many topics were revisited year-on-year without much progress. A number of MX Chairs emphasised that there were only two more years of this work programme (as the current inter-sessional process had only three years of MXs and not four that had happened previously). A number of contributions to the discussions indicated a desire to be able to communicate a set of results from the inter-sessional meetings to the Ninth BWC Review Conference scheduled for 2021. In some cases there were certain items of a more operational character, that some delegations suggested might be able to be put into practice earlier. An example of this is outline procedures for a state party to request assistance under Article VII that were discussed in MX4.

There is one significant development that impacts upon this process to contribute to the final MSP report – in the past, the Chair of the MSP also chaired that year's MX. In this inter-sessional process, there is an MSP Chair and five MX Chairs. This has distinct advantages in spreading the workload but has implications for the process of bringing the details from the separate MXs into a coherent whole for the MSP report. There are overlaps and synergies between the different MX topics that it would be important not to lose. The process of discussing each MX report in turn meant some questions were raised about whether certain subjects should be reported in one MX or another. There are some areas of firm agreement such as for some subjects within MX4, while at the same time there are distinct (and deep) divergences of views in relation to topics covered in MX5.

The MXs, topics and Chairs were as follows: MX1, 'Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X', Ambassador Maria Teresa Almojuela (Philippines); MX2, 'Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention', Pedro Luiz Dalcerro (Brazil); MX3, 'Strengthening National Implementation', Ambassador Julio Herráiz (Spain); MX4, 'Assistance, Response and Preparedness', Daniel Nord (Sweden); and MX5, 'Institutional Strengthening of the Convention', Otakar Gorgol (Czech Republic).

Side events

There were three side events on Thursday. One was convened at breakfast by the UK and Biosecure on 'Next Generation Biosecurity: Evolving biosecurity education and engaging scientists'. Two, at lunchtime, were convened by Germany on 'Strengthening the UNSGM: From Trusted Laboratories to Trained Experts', and by Russia on 'Centenary of Russia's Anti-plague Institute "Microbe": Lessons learned and opportunities for utilising mobile biomedical units. Presentation of UK-Russia working paper on Article VII.'

NOTE: There will be an additional MSP report covering the closing day. This will be published sometime next week and will be posted at the web locations given below.

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Friday 21st December 2018

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties: conclusion and reflections

The 2018 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) met for the last day on Friday 7 December. The morning was devoted to financial issues, reports from the MXs, universalization and the annual report from the Implementation Support Unit (ISU). The afternoon and evening were spent on the MSP final report.

Financial issues

The day started with further discussions under agenda item 7 on finances and the introduction by the Chair, Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), of a draft of the final report with a section on financial matters that built upon the updated elements paper of the previous day.

A number of delegations again highlighted that their national financial years did not match the UN calendar year which is used for financial planning in the BWC. This was considered by many delegations to be a significant factor in making it hard to pay assessed contributions early in the UN year. The Chair noted the need for the BWC to have a reliable funding stream while balancing the needs of national financial arrangements with UN financial procedures. Much of the discussion was about how to get states to pay their dues in full and on time. Brazil questioned the use of terms in the draft such as ‘discourage non-payment’ and ‘repayment plans’ and suggested that this latter term did not seem to be used in treaties that didn't have penalties for non-payment. Penalties were an issue that that delegation had expressed strong opposition to.

Financial issues were key in the later consideration of the final report.

Universalization

The report on universalization highlighted progress in increasing the membership of the Convention. The Chair welcomed the three new members that had joined during 2018 and left the podium to shake the hands of the delegates from the new members that were present in the room. Notably, the US intervention under this agenda item specifically welcomed the Central African Republic and Niue but made no mention of Palestine.

Conclusion of the report

The conclusion of the final report was a long and difficult negotiation. This started with the circulation by the Chair of a further iteration of the draft report during the lunch break.

The final result includes progress on financial issues with the establishment of a ‘working capital fund’ based on voluntary contributions. This should improve financial stability with the voluntary contributions likely to come from those governments that have been consistent in their payment of assessed contributions.

It is impossible to report so many hours of discussion in detail. One notable intervention was that of Brazil wanting to remove references to the day of informal meetings on Thursday having being ‘due to budgetary constraints’. This prompted responses from many other delegates that there was absolutely no doubt that this was the reason for the

informal day, as had been indicated clearly in the letter from the Chair that informed states parties of the change to the programme of work.

On matters in relation to the core of the BWC – efforts to control biological weapons – the report is almost devoid of substantive material. The section on the work of the MXs is only a couple of sentences long. The key sentence reads: ‘No consensus was reached on the deliberations including any possible outcomes of the Meetings of Experts.’

The MXs in 2019 will be held within the period 29 July to 9 August [*Note*: 1 August is a Swiss public holiday so the UN will be closed that day]. The MSP will be 3-6 December. These dates carry the caveat ‘taking into account the availability of resources’. The Chair of the 2019 MSP will be Ambassador Yann Hwang (France), with Ambassador Adrian Vierita (Romania) and Ambassador Andreano Erwin (Indonesia) as Vice-Chairs

At the end of the meeting, the Chair expressed regret that the report could not include more substantive elements. He particularly regretted the loss of reference to the Chairs of the MXs who he said had done excellent work. The MSP adopted its report at 00.24 and the meeting closed at 00.35.

Reflections

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report objectively and not give opinion. However, there are times that this style of reporting does not convey some of the atmosphere of meetings. The following are some personal reflections that do not necessarily represent anyone’s views other than the author’s own.

Financial issues dominated this MSP. Brazil [responsible for roughly 50 per cent of the outstanding arrears], was particularly outspoken in wanting to erase references in the final report to the financial difficulties that the BWC is facing. This was clearly working very effectively in its national interest, but was not seen by many in the room as being helpful to the BWC. Brazil was not the only country pushing in this direction. The controversy over a sentence in the draft report that suggested that payment of assessed contributions was ‘of utmost importance and prerequisite for the sustainability of the BWC’ would surprise people who are aware that staff and meetings cost money. It was notable that most countries opposed to this phrasing were in arrears with their contributions.

The position taken by Iran defies any conventional political analysis. It was the Iranian delegation that was responsible for there being no substantive element to the final report, much to the visible frustration of countries that often have been allied with that country, such as China and Russia. Indeed, this is a very clear illustration that there are times when issues guide alliances. For example, at the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) Fourth Review Conference (held the week before the MSP) there was a very strong Iran-Russia-Syria alliance in direct opposition to most western countries on issues relating to attribution of use of chemical weapons. Yet in the BWC a week later there was a joint Russia-UK paper on Article VII issues and Russia was forceful in pressing for a substantive outcome against the Iranian position.

The contrast between the productivity of the MXs and the difficult negotiations on the MSP report once again calls into question the purpose of the MSP report.

This MSP will be remembered as the travelling meeting, having moved around the Palais des Nations. On Friday it convened in room XVII, where the Meetings of Experts (MXs) had been held in August. At the end of the usual UN working day, when more negotiating time was needed, the MSP was moved to the Council Chamber (where the BWC itself was negotiated decades earlier). This was the fourth room in which the MSP had met during the space of four working days, having already met in rooms XVIII and XXIV.

Side events – There were no side events on Friday 7 December.

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