

Thursday 5th December 2019

## The general debate ends and discussion of the Meetings of Experts begins

The Meeting of States Parties (MSP) to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Wednesday with the conclusion of the general debate. The rest of the day's proceedings were taken up with consideration of the reports from the first three of the Meetings of Experts (MXs). As discussion of MX3 will continue on Thursday, this will be covered in the next daily report.

When introducing the agenda item for discussion of the MX reports the Chair of the MSP, Ambassador Yann Hwang (France), encouraged delegates to think of inputs into the report to be drawn up from the MSP and consider how topics could be carried forward into the 2020 meetings and then onwards to the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. To further encourage such thoughts at the end of the day the MSP Chair, working with the Chairs of the MXs, circulated an aide memoire of proposals made during the MXs this year.

The MSP has continued to operate close to the official timings in order to make the most of the available time. It is not clear how many delegates have appreciated the consequences of the limits to meeting times for this MSP caused by the UN financial austerity measures; at the current rate of progress it will be challenging to reach conclusion on a substantive report from the Meeting.

During the day, Russia circulated some draft text that included proposed paragraphs relating to each of the MXs that could go into the final report but the suggestions were not discussed in the formal proceedings.

### **General debate**

The general debate continued with statements from states parties (Fiji, Kenya, Sudan, Qatar, Costa Rica, Algeria and Kazakhstan) and from signatory states (Somalia, Haiti and Egypt). Vice-Chair Ambassador Andreano Erwin (Indonesia) took the chair for part of this. These were also statements from international organizations: European Union (EU), International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC), United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), World Health Organization (WHO), African Union, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Interpol, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). Following past practice, there was a joint statement from some NGOs, followed by statements from: Parliamentarians for Global Action, VERTIC, University of Massachusetts Lowell, University of Hamburg, Rogue Bioethics, Georgetown University, Stimson Center, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and University of London. As with statements given on Tuesday, where copies of statements are provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on the BWC website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

### **MX1 -- cooperation and assistance**

MX1 was on the topic of 'Cooperation and Assistance, with a Particular Focus on Strengthening Cooperation and Assistance under Article X' and was a two-day MX chaired by Ambassador Victor Dolidze (Georgia) who introduced the report of the meeting (BWC/MSP/2019/MX.1/2) together with the annex he prepared. There followed a wide-ranging discussion.

This topic brings together a cluster of issues for which there are long-standing divergences of views between governments, but there is some common ground. The Cooperation and Assistance Database [commonly known as the Article X database] was broadly welcomed but there were many comments about how it might be improved. These included broadening its scope to include offers from international organizations or even non-governmental sources. One suggestion was for successful matches of offers with recipients to be reported back so that the experience could be learned from. There was cross-regional support for a cooperation officer post in the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), although there were questions about whether this might be through the creation of a new post or a reallocation of tasks for the existing staff. A new post has obvious financial implications. There were a number of interventions in favour of the establishment of a cooperation committee that would be able to examine denials of national export licences – a proposal that has existed in a number of forms over the years. There were also interventions opposed to this. A number of references were made to the China-Pakistan proposal for a non-proliferation export control arrangement made in 2016. Paragraph 61 of the Final Declaration of the Seventh BWC Review Conference in 2011 called for the submission of national reports, at least every two years, on the steps taken by states parties to implement Article X. A number of delegations expressed regret that there were few such reports submitted. Germany noted its Article X report to this MSP (WP.3) which highlighted capacity building through the German Biosecurity Programme. Australia reminded the MSP of its 2018 working paper on structure and content of Article X reports.

### **MX2 – science and technology**

MX2 was on the topic of ‘Review of Developments in the Field of Science and Technology Related to the Convention’ and was a two-day MX chaired by Yury Nikolaichik (Belarus). In a similar vein to the session on MX1, he introduced the report of the meeting (BWC/MSP/2019/MX.2/2) together with the Chair's annex he prepared.

In the discussion that followed, there was broad agreement of a need for some form of review arrangement, but with very little detail in the discussion. In the past, for example, some delegations have favoured a small committee of experts while others have favoured some form of arrangement that would allow all states parties to contribute to it. The lack of expressions of support for specific models may be a positive sign as many delegates would seem to prefer achieving consensus on some form of review mechanism rather than pressing for their ideal. A number of delegates called for work to start now in order to have a proposal ready for the Ninth Review Conference. One area on which there was broad agreement in interventions in the discussions was about codes of conduct for scientists and engineers. There are divergences of views on some details, many delegations stressed that codes should be voluntary for states to adopt – as in the model code from a China-Pakistan working paper from MX.2 in 2018. Others suggested codes should come from scientists themselves. An area recognized as challenging is the identification of risks and benefits of new developments – how should the identified risks be used as an input into policy processes? How can benefits have best use made of them? Concerns were raised that an overemphasis on risks could have a negative impact on peaceful developments.

**Erratum** – a series of workshops referred to in report 2 were mistakenly ascribed as being through the ASEAN Regional Forum but were instead through the ISU, funded by Japan. There is to be a separate event to be hosted by the Philippines next year under the auspices of the ARF which will be a tabletop exercise to test regional response capabilities. These were conflated in my note taking. Apologies for any confusion caused, *mea culpa*.

*This is the third report from the Meeting of States Parties for the BWC which is being held from 2 to 6 December 2019 in Geneva. These reports have been produced for all BWC meetings since the Sixth Review Conference in 2006 by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are posted to <<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.*

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