

Wednesday 8th November 2016

## The second day: some themes from the general debate

The Eighth Review Conference of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Tuesday with the day's formal activities consisting of further statements made under the 'general debate' agenda item.

### **Tuesday speakers**

The morning started with a further group statement given by Laos for the ASEAN states. This was followed by statements from: Indonesia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Turkey, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Estonia, Montenegro, Peru, Thailand, Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, Italy, Myanmar, Ukraine, Ireland, Algeria, Venezuela (national), Iran and Argentina. Statements continued after lunch with: South Africa, Ecuador, Switzerland, Georgia (for Georgia & Germany), Kenya, Chile, Qatar, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Poland, Zambia, Armenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Portugal, Ethiopia, Jordan, Austria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Liberia. The Conference then moved on to international organizations with statements given by: the EU, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the 1540 Committee (established under UNSC resolution 1540). Where copies of statements have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on the BWC website. The statement by Liberia was its first since becoming a state party. [Côte d'Ivoire gave a statement to the Preparatory Committee in August.]

### **General debate themes**

The analysis here draws on statements made on Monday and Tuesday; there has been about ten hours spent thus far under this agenda item. Themes selected for analysis here are in no particular order. Further themes, including the future inter-sessional work programme, the ISU and verification, will be explored in future reports.

There were many welcomes for the states parties that had joined this since the last Review Conference and numerous calls for universality. Many delegations specifically urged states that were not yet parties to join the Convention.

Article X issues on peaceful uses were raised many times but there was no significant change in positions from those taken in earlier meetings. There were calls within many statements for improved implementation and the expressions of desire for an implementation mechanism of some form. There was support for the database intended to bring together offers of and requests for assistance but also questions raised about why this may not have been more effective. There were calls for Article X to be considered as a topic in any future inter-sessional work programme.

On issues surrounding the review of scientific and technological (S&T) developments there were a range of perspectives put forward. There was no explicit opposition to the idea that there would be advantages in carrying out some form of improved review process, but there were a number of perspectives on how this might be best carried out. A number of delegations gave significantly more detail in their positions on this subject

area than previously, an example of this is Brazil. The nature of the general debate is that delegations tend to promote the ideas they are in favour of rather than criticise others at this stage, making it difficult at this point to see where the overall balance of opinion is on this subject. The scale of participation of an S&T review process, i.e., should it be a small committee or a large body open to all states parties, remains an area of divergent views.

On Article VII and the issues of assistance in the event of use of biological weapons, statements mostly focused on a recognition of the problems posed, rather than solutions. There were a few generic offers of assistance, but specific offers were rare, with the repeated Russian proposal for mobile labs notable in this instance. There were a number of references to overlaps between Article VII and Article X issues, with the importance of effective detection and surveillance for both naturally and deliberately occurring diseases being emphasised.

On national implementation, there were many references to overlaps between BWC-related activities at a national level and resolution 1540 implementation. Some delegations indicated progress in national implementation measures, including indications of sources of advice that were most helpful to them. There was talk of suggested benefits of engaging with a broad range of stakeholders, including within industry and academia. There was some overlap with Article VII issues as some statements made reference to efforts to improve national-level responses to disease outbreaks which might be then used for assistance to others. For example, Ireland noted it was providing training to aid workers to survive CBRN environments.

On Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), many delegations noted that they had submitted their return this year with some putting forward a sub-text that this is what should be expected of BWC states parties. Concerns were expressed about the low levels of returns which have not yet reached half of states parties submitting in any one year. While CBMs have sometimes been referred to as 'voluntary', Switzerland called them 'politically binding and compulsory' in its statement. Some delegations noted that they had made their CBM returns public; Estonia suggested the default setting for returns should be public, not private. India reiterated its view that CBMs were not a tool to assess BWC compliance.

The statements that contained suggestions of threat perceptions primarily made reference to possible threats from non-state actors with very little reference to potential threats from states.

The most notable feature of the general debate this year has been the sheer number of statements which is higher than in past years. The statements may be repetitive, but in many cases they reflect action in capitals as the preparation of a statement usually involves interactions between government departments. Thus the process of preparing statements raises awareness of BWC issues within the states parties themselves. The number of African delegations making statements is considerably higher this time, in part perhaps reflecting the much greater sponsorship activity, raising the diversity of voices heard in the meeting room.

### **Side events**

Two side events were held on Tuesday. One, convened by Germany at lunchtime, was entitled 'Confidence in Compliance - Peer Review Visits as a Useful Tool for Increased Transparency'. The other, held in the evening, was convened by the UK and Kings College London and consisted of a screening of a BBC TV documentary 'Inside Porton Down' followed by a panel discussion.

*This is the third report from the Eighth BWC Review Conference. 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>>. A subscription link is available on each page.*

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