

Friday 13th December 2013

The fourth day: universalization, the ISU and drafting the final report

Opening of the meeting

The Meeting of States Parties (MSP) of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Thursday with the plenary scheduled to start an hour later than usual in order to allow delegations to have some informal interactions on the draft paragraphs for the final report circulated electronically on Wednesday evening. The Chair of the meeting, Judit Körömi of Hungary, the Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, circulated a hard copy version of this with additional paragraphs on Confidence-Building Measures at the start of proceedings. Another draft text, dealing with purely procedural issues that are uncontroversial (the dates of the meeting, administrative arrangements, and so forth), was also circulated.

The morning session had been scheduled for any remaining comments on any of the subject areas of the meeting but was used instead to consider universalization issues and the annual report of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) which had been scheduled for later. This freed up time for consideration of the draft report during the afternoon. Work on the this continued into the evening with a revised Chair's text expected in the morning.

The UN in New York announced on Thursday that the mission to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria had handed its final report to the Secretary-General. As many delegates and their colleagues back in capitals deal with both biological and chemical weapons issues, this could have an impact on the MSP proceedings.

Universalization

As agreed at BWC Review Conferences the Chair of each of the annual set of meetings of the inter-sessional process should provides a report each year on universalization activities. Introducing her report (document BWC/MSP/2013/3), the Chair welcomed the new members that had joined during the year – Cameroon, Nauru, Guyana and Malawi – bringing the total of States Parties to 170. She informed the meeting of the latest information she had regarding developments towards accession or ratification in certain countries, including Myanmar, Nepal, Haiti, Angola and Guinea. The report includes details of specific activities to promote universalization either by the Chair or the ISU, and also includes information from States Parties on their efforts. Points raised during discussion of the report included a recognition of the value of sponsoring representatives of non-parties to attend meetings, benefits of countries neighbouring non-parties encouraging them to join and a suggestion of a plan of action similar to that carried out in relation to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

ISU annual report

The annual report of the Implementation Support Unit (document BWC/MSP/2013/4) was introduced by Richard Lennane of the ISU who indicated that report was produced in a slightly different format from previous editions in order to make it more concise and to avoid

repeating routine information. The BWC meetings are not UN meetings, although they take place with the support of the UN secretariat and the use of UN document services. Issues raised in 2012 about document arrangements seem to have been resolved successfully.

Report of the meeting

After the discussions in the main meeting room on universalization and the ISU report, the Chair announced that she would adjourn the meeting to allow for an extended lunch break in order for delegates to consider further the draft text. During this time there were many discussions within delegations and between delegations on responses to the text. The plenary session did not reconvene properly until late into the afternoon during which the Chair asked for comments in general terms about aspects of the draft text to be followed up by submission of suggested amendments in writing.

A key factor underlying much of the discussion was how the purpose of the report was perceived. In other words, should this report be a stand-alone document, just like reports from MSPs had been in the past, or should it be highlighting what is new each year so that successive reports build on what has gone before? For stand-alone documents, standard practice is often to revert to consensus language that has been previously agreed on any points; this is a very successful method of negotiating documents. If the purpose is to highlight what is new in the meeting, previously used language does not add anything. It was clear from the discussion that there were different perceptions of the purpose of the report.

The proposed text was more detailed than that for earlier meetings, reflecting the more detailed interactions this year. A number of calls were made for a more tightly focused text with fewer details. Questions were raised about whether the text was balanced between the agenda items.

Evening consultations

The proceedings in the evening proved to be slightly at variance with the sequence of events that has happened at earlier MSPs. Usually on the Thursday evening there is a run of informal consultations, either delegation by delegation or with a collection of interested delegations in a small side room, and these consultations would go on until 10 or 11pm.

This year, immediately after the meeting adjourned at 6pm, the NAM states met to discuss further their detailed suggested amendments to the Chair's morning text. It was not clear how long this meeting would take and early indications were that this could be some hours. The Chair announced to delegates waiting in the main meeting room that rather than hold consultations that night, she would consider the suggested amendments that were being supplied to her from a number of sources and circulate a new text for the opening of the meeting at 10am Friday. By 7pm most delegates not in the meeting of the non-aligned had left the building. Shortly before 8pm, the NAM meeting broke and it was indicated that they had completed their list of suggested amendments which was then given to the Chair of the MSP as an input into her revised text.

Side event

One side event was convened before the start of the day's proceedings by the Hamburg Research Group for Biological Arms Control on 'Monitoring compliance relevant data - Launch of the Hamburg Research Group's trade monitoring website'. It was introduced by Ambassador Michael Biontino (Germany). Presentations were given by Gunnar Jeremias (Hamburg), Thomas Reinhold (Hamburg) and Dana Perkins (UN 1540 expert).

NOTE: There will be an additional MSP report covering the final day of the Meeting.

This will be published early next week and will be posted at the web location given below.

This is the fifth report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 9 to 13 December 2013 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). The reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>. The author can be contacted during the Meeting of States Parties on +41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.