

Tuesday 25th August 2009

The 2009 Meeting of Experts: the opening day

The 2009 Meeting of Experts (MX) opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada in the Chair. The meeting started with the routine administrative decisions such as the adoption of the agenda, the programme of work and participation in the meeting. In his opening statement, the Chair noted that, given the subject matter of the Meeting, it would benefit from greater use of open sessions. He also informed the Meeting that 20 experts from 9 countries who would otherwise have been unable to attend had been sponsored by Canada, the UK and the US and referred to this as a ‘concrete contribution’ to broadening the work of this year’s MX.

As an experiment, the ISU has placed some parts of the Meeting on a free web video streaming site – <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/bwc-meeting-of-experts-2009>.

Where copies of statements or presentations have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on its website <http://www.unog.ch/bwc>.

Plenary statements

After the completion of formalities, the Meeting heard plenary statements from States Parties in the following order: Cuba (on behalf of the non-aligned [NAM] states), Sweden (on behalf of the EU), Turkey, Russia, China, Indonesia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Senegal, the Philippines, Nigeria, Peru, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, India, Morocco, Norway, Ukraine, Chile, Iran, Kenya, Bangladesh, Yemen and Mexico.

Many statements covered common ground, such as the need for capacity building and the requirement for effective coordination between agencies, not only on the global scale, but also between relevant authorities on global, regional, national and local levels. A number of events were directly referred to, such as an Indonesian-Norwegian-ISU workshop on the BWC and global health held in Oslo in June and a workshop on BWC Article X and the World Health Organization International Health Regulations held the Friday before the MX. A number of Working Papers were summarized and some countries referred to improvements to national legislative measures. Some statements made direct reference to the positive work of NGOs in subject areas relevant to the BWC.

A number of states raised questions about transfer controls – the balance between the obligations under the BWC for each State Party to ensure it does not assist others in the acquisition of biological weapons [Article III] while at the same time to ensure ‘the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the use of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins for peaceful purposes’ [Article X.1] has long been the subject of discussion. India noted that ‘strengthened implementation of the provisions of Article III would ensure that the cooperation envisaged under Article X is not abused’. Iran suggested that a ‘standing committee’ should be established under the Convention to consider cases of transfer denials. Most, if not all, statements from NAM countries made direct reference to Article X.

Cuba noted a NAM summit statement from July that ‘stressed the importance’ of the 2009 BWC meetings and noted that the Convention ‘forms a whole’ and that ‘although it is possible to consider certain aspects separately, it is critical to deal with all of the issues interrelated to this Convention in a balanced and comprehensive manner’. The US statement was delivered by the delegation’s senior expert rather than by the Head of Delegation, as is that country’s tradition at these meetings. This gave the statement a more pragmatic tone than had sometimes been conveyed in recent years. The statement by Senegal would seem to be the first by that country at a BWC meeting and is a sign of the increasing breadth of active participation in the Convention.

Working presentations

As there was some time remaining between the completion of the plenary statements and the scheduled start of the NGO statements, four presentations scheduled for Tuesday morning were brought forward. The US described the Global Disease Protection Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Sweden (on behalf of the EU) outlined the two relevant EU Joint Actions; Turkey provided details of its new disease surveillance arrangements; and a representative from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) based in Stockholm described its work.

NGO statements

As in previous BWC meetings, time was set aside during the afternoon to provide an opportunity for NGOs to address the Meeting in an informal session. Statements were given in the following order: University of Bradford; Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC); Pax Christi International; Center for Biosecurity of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC); Center for Arms Control and Non Proliferation/Scientists Working Group on Biological Weapons; BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP); National Defence Medical College of Japan & University of Bradford; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI); and Center for Defense, Law & Public Policy of the Texas Tech University School of Law.

Side events

There were two side events on Monday. The first was the official launch of the EU’s second Joint Action in support of the BWC. The Joint Action (officially referred to as 2008/858/CFSP) consists of four projects: ‘Promotion of the universalisation of the BTWC’; ‘Assistance to States Parties for the national implementation of the BTWC’; ‘Promotion of the submission of CBM declarations on a regular basis by States Parties to the BTWC’; and ‘Support for the BTWC Inter-Sessional Process’. Presentations were given by Dr Andreas Strub, Deputy to the Personal Representative of the High-Representative on non-proliferation of WMD, General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, Richard Lennane, Head, ISU, and Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada. The launch was chaired by Ambassador Magnus Hellgren of Sweden. Countries wishing to be involved in the Joint Action projects were encouraged from the platform to approach the ISU.

The second side event (held shortly after the EU presentations) was dubbed ‘speed networking’ – an activity novel to the BWC that has previously had success in human rights meetings. After each minute, participants were rotated around the room to face a different person. Forty-two individuals took part and got to know new people.

This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 24 to 28 August 2009 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) in co-operation with the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC). Copies are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

For questions during the Meeting of Experts relating to these reports, please contact Richard Guthrie (+41 76 507 1026 or <richard@cbw-events.org>).