

Thursday 1st December 2022

The third day: NGOs, MSP Chairs and the Committee of the Whole

The Ninth Review Conference for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued its work on Wednesday. In normal circumstances the Conference would have carried on with statements from international organizations and UN agencies as part of the general debate. However, the divergence of views on the continuation of those statements expressed at the end of Tuesday's session appeared to remain unresolved on Wednesday. Instead, the informal session for NGO statements was convened before adjourning for the rest of the morning. The afternoon saw a plenary session in which the Chairs of three of the four Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) of the recently completed inter-sessional work programme addressed the Conference to pass on their experiences. This was then followed by the opening of the Committee of the Whole.

NGO statements

Following recent practice, there was a joint statement from some NGOs followed by statements from: Biosecure; Bronic; Council on Strategic Risks; University of Bradford; George Mason University; Hamburg Research Group; Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights; Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security; Center for Biodefense and Global Infectious Diseases; King's College London; VERTIC; and the Center for Biosafety Research and Strategy at Tianjin University. As with statements given in other sessions, where copies of statements are provided by those who delivered them, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU) will place these on the Review Conference website which can be found at <https://meetings.unoda.org/bwc-revcon/biological-weapons-convention-ninth-review-conference-2022>.

The experiences of the MSP Chairs

In introducing this session, President of the Review Conference Ambassador Leonardo Bencini (Italy) noted that the Conference was not starting from scratch but had many inputs it could consider and reminded delegates that the Report of the 2017 MSP had included: 'The Ninth Review Conference will consider the work and outcomes it receives from the Meetings of States Parties and the Meetings of Experts and decide by consensus on any inputs from the intersessional programme and on any further action.'

The Chair of the 2017 MSP, Amandeep Singh Gill (India), noted that the MSP that year had been tasked by the Eighth Review Conference (2016) to aim for consensus on an inter-sessional programme which he described as 'not an easy outcome', but that it had produced a new structure for the work. He highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic had underlined the importance of the inter-sessional work and urged delegates to come together to agree a substantial inter-sessional process from this Review Conference. Ljupčo Gjorgjinski (North Macedonia), Chair of the 2018 MSP, suggested that the work programme had 'accomplished quite a lot on substance, but very little on making effective use of that substance'. He discussed the work on BWC finances that year and used this as an example of how annual political meetings can steer implementation but highlighted that the links between the technical and political meetings were not good. This was also highlighted by Yann Hwang (France), Chair of the 2019 MSP, who reminded delegates of

his *Aide Mémoire*, drawn up in collaboration with the Chairs of the Meetings of Experts (MXs) that year, to collate the proposals made during the 2019 MXs in order to carry forward topics into the 2020 meetings and then onwards to the Ninth Review Conference. Although the publication of this *Aide Mémoire* as an official document was blocked by one delegation without explanation, it was posted on the website of that meeting as CRP.1; he invited delegates to the Review Conference to read it. He suggested that the Chairs of future MSPs could form a Troika in order to provide continuity of leadership. The President informed the Conference that the Chair of the 2020 MSP, Cleopa Mailu (Kenya), had been invited to speak but had been called away for urgent business.

The convening of the panel of past MSP Chairs was an innovation for this Review Conference and appeared to provide useful inputs to delegations.

The Committee of the Whole (CoW)

The CoW convened for its first meeting with Ambassador Tatiana Molcean (Republic of Moldova). The aim of the early meetings of the CoW is to do a ‘first reading’ of the article-by-article review. The first reading is intended to allow a compilation of suggestions without lengthy discussion. Once the compilation has been put together, a ‘second reading’ can be carried out with the advantages and disadvantages of the various suggestions being debated. Owing to clarifications being requested behind the scenes about the proposed roles of the CoW and the Drafting Committee (which is yet to convene), the CoW meeting started with a ‘cross-sectoral’ session to allow the introduction of proposals by delegations that would not have fallen within the article-by-article review. With the questions regarding the Committee roles remaining under discussion, this was a pragmatic solution for maintaining the flow of the substantive work of the Conference. The CoW then moved on to the article-by-article review.

Ambassador Molcean asked for delegations to be ‘precise and concise’ in order to make effective use of time before opening the floor for the cross-sectoral session. All but one of the proposals put forward in this session were contained in working papers that have been published; the other was a proposal from Cuba for which the working paper will be published soon. These proposals will be reported in more detail as they each become the subject of focused discussion.

The article-by-article first reading considered Articles I to III in turn, although one delegation asked for more time to prepare its comments in relation to Article II.

General debate themes (continued)

This continuation of discussion on themes draws from statements given on Monday and Tuesday. Further themes, including national implementation, Article VII issues and financial issues, will be explored in future daily reports.

Implementation Support Unit (ISU) – References to the ISU were made in most statements with many expressions of gratitude for its work. There were suggestions that the ISU could be put on a more permanent footing rather than requiring its mandate to be renewed at each Review Conference. This would allow for improved strategic planning. There were proposals for additions of posts in the form of a science officer and a cooperation officer, with a recognition that these would have resource implications. There were acknowledgements that the tasks allocated to the ISU would be affected by whatever decisions were made for a future inter-sessional process.

Side events

There were four side events on Wednesday – two at breakfast and two at lunchtime. Details are provided on the Conference website.

This is the fourth report from the Ninth BWC Review Conference (28 November-16 December 2022). These reports have been produced for all BWC meetings with NGO registration since the Sixth Review Conference (2006) by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). They are available from <<https://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<https://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. A subscription link is available on each webpage. Financial support for these reports has been gratefully received from Global Affairs Canada. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <richard@cbw-events.org.uk>.