

Friday 28th August 2009

The Fourth Day: needs, challenges, guests and posters

The fourth day of the 2009 Meeting of Experts (MX) opened on Thursday morning with Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada in the Chair and started with the continuation of the Wednesday afternoon working session. In addition to the decision on Wednesday afternoon to drop the discussion panel scheduled for Thursday morning on integrating responses, a further decision was taken to drop the proposed discussion panel on public-private partnerships in order to bring the MX back to its original schedule by the end of the day. This meant moving the working session of invited speakers to later in the day; however, it was possible to complete this in time for the poster session to start as scheduled.

During the afternoon, the draft report of the Meeting was circulated as well as an initial draft of the compendium of ideas raised.

Specific needs and challenges

The working session on the theme of 'Specific needs for capacity-building and challenges in dealing with disease' was completed on Thursday morning with presentations from: China, Senegal, United Kingdom, Germany, Pakistan, Philippines, and Nigeria.

Senegal called for greater resources to be provided by donors but also called for greater South-South co-operation, a call repeated by the Chair. Cuba, asking a question of Senegal, reminded the MX that it had circulated a working paper on behalf of the non-aligned states which advocated that there was a need for a formal mechanism for international co-operation under the Convention.

Pakistan noted that while it had assessed it had the basic healthcare infrastructure required to tackle the challenges associated with emerging and re-emerging diseases there remained certain needs. Some examples were provided which included guidelines and standard operating procedures for complex emergencies, availability of mobile labs for field investigations and consumables used in testing processes such as reagents.

While much of this MX has been focused on infectious disease, the Philippines, gave an example of the impact of toxins [toxins are defined as poisonous substances produced by living things] and described the challenges posed by 'Red Tide' algal blooms during which shellfish become poisonous to humans because of saxitoxin production.

Nigeria recognized that there was a lack of infrastructure, skills and capacity in the country, but that substantial progress had been made in recent years. A recently launched Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program should enhance capabilities further, but without additional efforts in this area it will be difficult for the Nigerian public health system 'to meet up with the obligations of managing the current global threats of disease outbreaks and potential bioterrorism'.

Guest presentations

The nature of the topic of the 2009 MX is such that the Chairman of the Meeting had decided to allow a limited number of organizations and individuals to address a special

working session set aside for the purpose on Thursday morning (which ran into the afternoon). These presenters came from a variety of academic, business or international governance backgrounds. Those who were not registered to attend the MX in any other capacity, such as being included as a member of a national delegation, attended as 'Guests of the Meeting' – a category which was used previously in 2005 and 2008.

Presentations were given by, or on behalf of: ProMED [the Programme for Monitoring Emerging Diseases], Health Map, the Global Health Security Initiative, Amyris Biotechnologies, the European Biosafety Association, the International Council of the Life Sciences, Biosafety & Biosecurity International Conferences, the International Vaccine Institute, the International Science and Technology Center, Anupa Gupte and the Robert Koch Institute, Berlin

Poster session

Around 25 posters were mounted on stands outside the main conference room prepared by a number of States Parties, agencies, associations and NGOs on subjects relevant to this year's topic. For those not familiar with poster sessions at scientific conferences, the authors of each poster stand next to it and so can engage with delegates who are interested in the subject matter. This creates an opportunity for focused, yet informal, interaction which many delegates found very useful when it was tried for the first time during the 2008 MX. The poster session this year seems to have been similarly appreciated.

Side events

There were three side events on Thursday. The first was held in the morning before the start of the working session by Anupa Gupte, an independent researcher, on 'Biorisks and Ecohealth Implications for BWC Implementation: Tools for Governance'.

The second was a lunchtime seminar on the subject of medical counter-measures (MCM) and was the inaugural international seminar of the International Security & Biopolicy Institute (ISBI) <<http://biopolicy.org>>. Presentations were given by: Al Shofe, Senior Vice-President of Emergent BioSolutions, Inc. (ISBI Chairman) on stockpiling issues associated with anthrax preparedness; Leslie Platt of Daylight Forensic, Inc. (ISBI Vice-President) on a proposal for global biopharmaceutical preparedness in the event of a pandemic catastrophe; and Prof. Barry Kellman, (ISBI President), outlining an '8-Step Strategy for Global MCM Stockpiling and Delivery'.

The third event, held at the end of the poster session, saw the official launch of two new BWPP publications – 'Building a Global Ban: Why States Have Not Joined the BWC' (made possible with the support of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and the 'BWPP Biological Weapons Reader' (made possible with the support of the Swedish Foreign Ministry). Prof. Marie Chevrier of the Center for Arms Control and Non Proliferation/Scientists Working Group on Biological Weapons (Chair of the BWPP Board) introduced the publications and brief comments were given by Jo Adamson of the UK delegation and Kathryn McLaughlin (former BWPP Acting Director).

Please note: *there will be an additional MX report covering the final day of the Meeting. This will be published early next week and will be available via:*
<<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

This is the fifth 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.uk>).