

Tuesday 24th August 2010

The 2010 Meeting of Experts: the opening day

The Meeting opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair and started with the routine administrative decisions such as the adoption of the agenda, the programme of work, the rules of procedure and participation in the meeting. In his opening statement, the Chair noted that the multi-dimensional nature of the biological weapons problem required the engagement of expertise from beyond that in traditional multilateral efforts. He welcomed the sponsorship by Canada, UK and USA of around 20 experts from 12 countries who would otherwise have been unable to attend.

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>>. Monday's sessions of the MX were all watchable via <<http://www.ustream.tv/user/bwcisu>>.

Plenary statements

The Meeting heard plenary statements from States Parties in the following order: Cuba (on behalf of the non-aligned [NAM] states), Belgium (on behalf of the EU), Australia (on behalf of the Western Group), the United States, Russia, Chile, Indonesia, China, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran, Mexico, Morocco, India, Algeria, Australia (national statement), Philippines, Armenia, Argentina, Brazil, Norway, Belarus, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Kenya. One statement was also given by an inter-governmental body – the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

Many statements covered common ground, such as the benefits of international partnerships and the need for capacity building, especially in the area of early detection and identification of diseases. Many spoke of 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. Some statements were brief introductions to Working Papers submitted or highlights of presentations to be given later in the week. These will be dealt in later daily reports.

Two themes emerged regarding existing capacities for response planning. A number of States Parties described their systems in terms that suggested they were established and operating while others described some of the challenges faced in putting such systems into place. Many of these challenges were resource issues or the need for personnel with particular skills, such as for disease identification and containment. There were offers from other States Parties for training in these types of skills.

A need for arrangements for communicating needs by States Parties that may have been the target for use of biological weapons was identified, with such arrangements being seen as to the benefit of countries providing as well as receiving assistance. Iran suggested an inventory of types of assistance that could be provided would be useful.

Article X of the Convention was raised by a number of States Parties. The BWC contains a bargain – the renunciation by States Parties of hostile uses of biological materials

and technologies in return for opportunities to gain the benefits of the peaceful uses of them. This is embodied in Article X. There were many references to ‘balance’ or ‘balanced implementation’ of the Convention; a slight change from the focus on ‘full implementation’ of Article X a year ago – a term that raised questions about what ‘full’ might mean. The concept of balance implies that as the regulatory aspects of the Convention are strengthened, so should the promotional aspects. Security, economic and geographical considerations influence the perspectives of individual governments on the balance of this bargain.

The UN Secretary-General’s mechanism to investigate allegations of use of biological weapons was raised. Russia expressed the view that this should only be used in cases of breaches of the BWC or the Geneva Protocol (and so not, for example, for terrorism incidents). China, noting that allegations of use could be presented to the UN Security Council [UNSC] under Article VI of the BWC, remarked that if the UNSC decides to initiate an investigation, such an investigation should be conducted under the aegis of the UNSC.

Developments in national implementation of the provisions of the Convention were noted; in particular, delegates from Chile, Malaysia, Morocco and Pakistan all spoke of progress of legislation in their countries.

The Western Group announced the nomination of Ambassador Paul van den IJssel of the Netherlands as President of the Seventh Review Conference. The role of President rotates between the three BWC regional groups and 2011 is the turn of the Western Group. This post will be formally decided at the Meeting of States Parties in December.

NGO statements and questionnaire

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; Landau Network, National Defence Medical College of Japan & University of Bradford; London School of Economics, University of Exeter; and the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter Academy Panel on International Issues. A presentation was also given by Anupa Gupte, described as an ‘independent expert’.

The BWPP circulated a questionnaire asking delegates to select from a list of 18 topics that might be raised at the Seventh Review Conference and identify 5 they considered to be the most important. A significant number of responses had been received by the end of the day and it is hoped that more States Parties will be able to respond in the coming days.

Side events

There were two side events on Monday. The first, at lunchtime, was convened by the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford (UK) and related to the launch of three new papers: ‘Preparing for the BTWC Seventh Review Conference in 2011’, ‘An Annual Meeting for the BTWC’ and ‘An Accountability Framework for the BTWC’, copies of which can be found via <<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/sbtwc>>. Presentations were given by Malcolm Dando and Graham Pearson, two of the authors of these reports.

The second side event, held after the formal proceedings of the day had been completed was ‘speed networking’ – an activity that had been successfully carried out at the 2009 MX. After each minute and a half, participants were rotated around the room to meet a different person.

This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 23 to 27 August 2010 in Geneva. The reports are designed to help people who are not in Geneva to follow the proceedings. Copies are available via <<http://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>>.

The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Financial assistance for this project has been provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sweden.

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>).