

Tuesday 7th December 2010

The Opening Day: statements and positions

The 2010 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) opened on Monday morning with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. Before the routine administrative decisions such as the adoption of the agenda, the programme of work, the rules of procedure and participation in the meeting, the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, Sergei Ordzhonikidze, communicated a message from the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. Talking of the pace of advances in the life sciences, he said: 'there is a pressing need for a structured and regular means of monitoring developments and assessing their implications'. He also called upon those states that had not done so to sign and ratify the Convention 'without delay'.

The rest of the proceedings in the main meeting room consisted of statements. Where copies of these have been provided by those who delivered them, the Implementation Support Unit (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 states [NAM]), Belgium (on behalf of the EU), Canada (on behalf of the 'JACKSNNZ' – [an informal grouping of Japan, Australia, Canada, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand]), Japan, China, Russia, Mexico, the United States, Australia, Germany, Argentina, Algeria, Chile, Serbia, Armenia, South Africa, India and Switzerland, at which point the meeting broke for lunch. After lunch, statements were heard from Bangladesh, Morocco, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Kenya, Ghana and Canada (right of reply). The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) then made a statement.

The statements, overall, seemed more developed than in recent comparable meetings. This may be as many participants are looking towards the Seventh Review Conference which is to be held in 2011. Corridor discussions with delegates indicated that the imminence of the Review Conference has prompted some officials to allocate more time to focus on BWC-related issues.

A number of themes were identifiable in the statements, in addition to general comments on desirability of universal membership of the Convention, national implementation, verification issues and biosecurity issues. There was much on international cooperation under Article X, with reference to 'balanced implementation'. Delegates were reminded in some statements of paragraph 54 of the final document of the Sixth Review Conference which 'encourages States Parties to provide appropriate information on how [Article X] is being implemented'. The UN Secretary-General's investigation mechanism was mentioned many times and questions were raised about how this should be integrated with other international arrangements. Many statements made positive comments on the work of the ISU with most of these making explicit or implicit indications that it should continue past

2011. Some suggested the resources available to it should be enhanced. While most statements referred in some way, directly or indirectly, to capacity building in relation to response to biological attacks, some noted that this extra capacity was most valuable to have in place before an attack. On Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), a number of states referred to their reexamination to see if improvements to the system of returns could be made, although a few others expressed some hesitation or reservation about aspects of this. It was noted that there has been a record number of CBM returns so far in 2010, but that this still means that less than half of all States Parties have submitted returns this year. The importance of assistance for some delegates to be able to attend the MSP was raised.

There were some notable points from individual statements. The Cuba/NAM statement had a particular focus on the proposal for a mechanism for implementation of Article X that had been made in 2009 (and contained in doc. BWC/MSP/2009/MX/WP.24). The EU noted its Joint Actions and CBRN Action Plan. China reiterated its preference that any investigation of alleged use of biological weapons be held under the auspices of the UN Security Council through Article VI of the BWC rather than via the UN Secretary-General's mechanism. Serbia stated that its Parliament had voted to withdraw that country's reservation to the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Iran suggested that the primary responsibility for response to a biological attack should rest with States Parties and that international organizations could only play a complementary role. Iran also raised the subject of sanctions applied by Canada against entities in Iran, suggesting that these had been applied in an unjustified manner. Canada, exercising its right of reply, expressed its view that these sanctions had been applied in an appropriate manner under the authority of UN Security Council resolution 1929. The OIE noted it was looking into the possibility of formalising arrangements under which it might provide technical expertise for investigations of alleged use of biological weapons.

Statements by NGOs

As in previous Meetings, time was set aside during the afternoon to provide an opportunity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the Meeting in an informal session. Statements were given in the following order: University of Bradford; London School of Economics; International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES); National Defence Medical College of Japan & Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; Pax Christi International; Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC); Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; Research Group for Biological Arms Control, Hamburg; Wilton Park; BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP); the Center for Biodefense, Law and Public Policy, Texas Tech University; and the European Biosafety Association.

Side Event

There was one side event on Monday which was convened by the Geneva Forum, Germany, Norway and Switzerland during the lunch break on the topic of 'Opportunities to Enhance to BWC Confidence-Building Measures'. Introductory remarks were given by Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland) and Jon Erik Strømø (Norway) followed by a presentation on the project on CBMs sponsored by the three countries by Volker Beck (Germany). Silvia Cattaneo of the Geneva Forum chaired the event.

This is the second report from the Meeting of States Parties for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 6 to 10 December 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.

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