

Friday 10th December 2010

The Fourth Day: Partners, universality, the ISU and draft text

The 2010 Meeting of States Parties (MSP) of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) continued on Thursday with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. The morning session started with discussion of ‘international partners and mechanisms’, the last of the sub-topics. In addition, Nigeria made a plenary statement which included a description of its inter-ministerial National Authority on the BWC and proposals for a Nigerian Centre for Disease Control. The rest of the day’s proceedings dealt with issues of universalization, the report of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), and drafting of the final report of the MSP. Official documents and presentations referred to will be available via the ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>> in due course.

International partners and mechanisms

Presentations were given by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs on the Secretary-General’s investigation mechanism; by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons; and by the European Union Crisis Management Unit on the EU’s crisis response capacity. There then followed a discussion on the issues raised.

Reports on universalization activities and the ISU

Introducing his report on universalization (document BWC/MSP/2010/4), Ambassador Oyarce described universality as a ‘fundamental matter’ and it was a ‘matter of concern’ that there had been no new States Parties this year. The report noted that Cameroon and Malawi had completed all internal procedures. The ISU added that since the universalization report had been finalized Angola had indicated they may be able to produce an instrument of accession in the near future. The report of the ISU (document BWC/MSP/2010/2) was introduced by Richard Lennane, Head of the Unit. The report describes activities over the previous 12 months which has been a busy time for the ISU. The number of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) received had reached 70, a record for any single year, and there was still the possibility that further returns could be submitted by the end of 2010.

At the end of a short discussion on the report, there was a round of applause for the ISU. This is a rare event in diplomatic meetings and is therefore notable.

The draft final report of the meeting

The draft procedural elements of the report were circulated on Wednesday and as these simply describe the practical aspects of convening the Meeting they rarely attract comment. On Thursday afternoon, the Chair circulated draft text for language relating to the substantive matters of the MSP, after which the meeting was adjourned for about 90 minutes. On reconvening the meeting, there was a period of silence as no delegation seemed keen to be the first to raise points on the draft. Breaking this pause, Senegal took the floor to express frustration that there was version of the draft in French. The Chair replied that this was unfortunately due to resource issues.

There then followed nearly an hour of interventions that revealed there were distinctly divergent views on the draft text. Some states, including China, India and Iran, felt the text moved too close to making decisions or endorsing particular policy choices. Other delegations, such as Germany, the UK and the USA noted that the use of language that States Parties 'agreed to the value of ...', which was used many times in the draft, was very different to having 'agreed' to some particular policy. India, for example, indicated that the draft text included 'agreed on the value of informing the ISU in the case of the alleged use of biological or toxin weapons' yet this had not been discussed in the MSP.

In summary, the general tone of the debate was that the non-aligned and China perceived the draft paragraphs to be different in character from what had been agreed in previous years and that a shorter, more procedural, report was needed; while the western countries perceived the draft text as being consistent with that agreed in earlier years and wished to maintain the level of substantive detail.

The situation on the Thursday of the MSP in 2010 was in some ways a mirror image of that on the same day the year before. In 2009 a paragraph in the draft text on a possible mechanism for implementation of Article X noted this was something the Seventh Review Conference 'could' consider. In 2009, the USA indicated this form of text would presuppose that such a mechanism would end up on the agenda of the Review Conference and that an MSP could not prejudge this, while the UK expressed a view that the report of the meeting was to highlight common understandings and that the proposal for such a mechanism did not fulfil this criterion. The essentially similar points are being raised by China, India and Iran, amongst others, on the draft text in 2010, in particular regarding the UNSG investigation mechanism. This mirroring was noted in corridor discussions with delegates from non-aligned countries but was seemingly unnoticed by those from western states.

A new draft text is due to be made available to delegations at 9am Friday.

Side Events

There were two side events on Thursday. The first, before the day's main proceedings, was convened by the OPCW on the subject of its ASSISTEX III exercise in Tunisia in October dealing with assistance and protection in the event of use of chemical weapons. A presentation was given by Muhammad Kazi (OPCW) and a short film on the exercise was shown. The second event, at lunchtime, was convened by the University of Bradford (UoB) and the Inter-Academy Panel (IAP). Part 1 of the event, 'Preparing for the Seventh Review Conference', contained presentations on three new reports in the UoB 'Review Conference Paper' series: 'Achieving consensus at the Seventh Review Conference', introduced by Nicholas Sims (LSE); 'Improving the CBM regime', introduced by Filippa Lentzos (LSE); and 'Effective Implementation; The Key Role of Awareness Raising and Education' introduced by Graham Pearson (UoB) on behalf of Malcolm Dando (UoB). Part 2 of the event, 'Dual-Use Education' contained presentations relating to three recent meetings: 'Promoting Dual Use Education in the Life Sciences' by Jo Husbands (IAP); 'Global Networking to Promote Biosecurity and Limit Dual Use Risks: The Science-Ethics-Law-Security Nexus', by Giulio Mancini (Landau Network-Centro Volta) and 'Dual-Use Education for Life Scientists: Mapping the Current Global Landscape and Developments' by Masamichi Minehata (UoB). The event was chaired by Judi Sture (UoB).

NOTE: There will be an additional MSP report covering the final day of the Meeting.

This will be published early next week and will be posted at the web location given below.

This is the fifth 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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