

Friday 26th August 2010

## The Fourth Day: Improving national capabilities

The 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC/BWC) continued on Thursday, with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. Again, there was an early start with a pre-meeting side event. This has a knock-on effect for delegates as some delegation and group coordination meetings now have to be scheduled to start earlier so that they can be finished an hour earlier than usual.

The draft report of the meeting detailing procedural aspects, as well as the draft compilation of suggestions made during the meeting that would be appended to the report, was circulated to delegates during the day.

Thursday also saw a parallel event on confidence-building measures (CBMs). Coinciding with this, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia submitted its CBM return, bringing the total this year to 70. This is the highest number of returns submitted in any single year. Although the deadline for submissions is 15 April, these can be received at any time and so this number may yet rise.

### **Provision of assistance**

Two final presentations under the 'Provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations' heading were given in a spillover session on Thursday morning. Presentations were given by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Australia presented on national assistance arrangements for emergencies in other countries, based on an all-hazards approach, that was held over from the subject of Tuesday's meetings.

The OPCW gave a presentation on its arrangements for investigation of alleged use. This complemented the other OPCW presentation on Wednesday on assistance & protection issues. The OPCW noted that the third in a series of exercises involving alleged use and the provision of assistance & protection, ASSISTEX 3, is to be held in Tunisia in October. The ICRC presented some thinking prompted by a study into what the Red Cross might be called on to do as an humanitarian relief agency if there was an allegation of use of biological weapons. The ICRC noted that the identification of a disease in any particular circumstance might be known as the 'first diagnosis'. However, if there was an allegation that a disease had been deliberately induced, this would require a 'second diagnosis' to resolve the situation. But who should make this second diagnosis and how long might this take?

### **Improving national capabilities**

The scheduled subject for Thursday morning was 'Improving national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems'. Presentations were given by Chile, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Japan, China and Germany. The subject continued after the discussion panel with presentations by France, Czech Republic, Iraq, Indonesia, Switzerland, France and Mexico.

While most of these presentations were fairly specific to each country, there were numerous common elements. In order to be able to have effective 'disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems', countries require, *inter alia*: trained public health personnel; systems for collecting samples, whether from humans, animals, plants or the environment; arrangements for transporting samples to laboratories; appropriate laboratory infrastructure; trained laboratory staff; access to epidemiological and other medical understandings; together with arrangements for transmitting these outputs into a policy structure. Finally, that policy structure needs to be able to act on decisions and to be able to call on relevant resources. While improvements in any one of these areas can enhance overall preparedness, lack of capacity in a single area can significantly reduce overall capabilities.

Some presentations were on specific matters. Japan demonstrated software which models how pathogens travel in the air which can then assist responders to estimate how many people might be affected by a release. Germany gave details of a 2009 laboratory proficiency test for the detection of ricin involving 17 participants in 12 countries. France outlined lessons learned from the experience of a Chikungunya outbreak in La Réunion.

### **Informal Panel Discussion**

After lunch, the meeting proceedings were adjourned to allow the room to be used for an informal panel discussion, chaired by Ambassador Serhiy Komisarenko (Ukraine). Panelists were Irma Makalinao (University of the Philippines), Randall Murch (Virginia Tech) and Anwar Nasim (Organization of the Islamic Conference Standing Committee on Scientific & Technological Cooperation). A question and answer session followed. Unlike some previous years when the Q&A sessions were sometimes relatively short, the panel prompted a number of questions and further discussion.

### **Parallel event**

During Thursday there was a parallel event in the form of a workshop on CBMs organized under the EU Joint Action in support of the BWC. The workshop was aimed at assisting countries in understanding the processes involved in CBM submission.

### **Side events**

Following the pattern of this MX, there were two side events on Thursday. The first, in the morning before the start of the formal events of the day, was entitled 'Global efforts to enhance health and law enforcement cooperation'. It was convened by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Presentations were given by Scott Sheppard (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), Anthony Kessel (Health Protection Agency, UK) and Alan King (Metropolitan Police, UK). The meeting was co-chaired by Kristine Beardsley (FBI) and Lisa Rotz (CDC).

The second side event, held at lunchtime, was entitled 'The 7th BWC Review Conference – Three Proposals for Progress' and was convened by the International Security and Biopolicy Institute (ISBI). Presentations were given by Robert Kadlec (ISBI), Randall Murch (Virginia Tech) and Barry Kellman (ISBI).

***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 posted at the web location given below.***

*This is the fifth 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.*

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