

Monday 23rd August 2010

The 2010 Meeting of Experts: setting the scene

The opening of the 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) marks the fourth and final year of the second inter-sessional process for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC). The MX will be followed by a one-week Meeting of States Parties (MSP) in December. The BWPP daily reports from the 2006 Review Conference and the Meetings in 2007, 2008 and 2009 are available via the BWPP website at <http://www.bwpp.org>.

The topic for discussion at the MX and MSP this year is 'Provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations upon request by any State Party in the case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons, including improving national capabilities for disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems'. This topic was agreed at the Sixth Review Conference for the BWC which was held at the end of 2006. The 2010 meetings will be chaired by Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile.

This is related to the topic discussed in 2009: 'With a view to enhancing international cooperation, assistance and exchange in biological sciences and technology for peaceful purposes, promoting capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and containment of infectious diseases: (1) for States Parties in need of assistance, identifying requirements and requests for capacity enhancement; and (2) from States Parties in a position to do so, and international organizations, opportunities for providing assistance related to these fields'. Therefore, some of the working papers and other contributions to the 2009 may have some relevance to the discussion this year.

One background paper by the BWC's Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and six Working Papers by States Parties had been issued as formal MX documents before the opening of the meeting. A further two background papers and eight working papers had been issued as 'advance versions' prior to being typeset as official documents. The advance release of papers allows for their contents to be considered before start of the MX. All these papers can be found via the BWC ISU website <http://www.unog.ch/bwc>; official documents can also be found via the UN documents server <http://www.documents.un.org>. Public sessions of the MX will be watchable live over the web as well as being archived for future viewing, see <http://www.ustream.tv/user/bwccisu>.

The MX will include sessions for plenary statements, as well as more focused working sessions, a poster session and a discussion panel. As with earlier meetings, there will be a number of side events. While the side events have traditionally been held by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there has been a trend for other bodies, for example inter-governmental organizations, to make use of these opportunities as well.

The connection between the BWC and diseases in all their aspects

It may seem odd at first glance that issues of 'disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis and public health systems' are being considered at a meeting of an international treaty that is

primarily concerned with international security issues. This oddity can be explained with the understanding that the use of biological weapons – whether in warfare or as a terrorist or criminal act – is nothing more than the deliberate use of disease. With this understanding, it is apparent that there is much common ground in responses to outbreaks of disease, whether they stem from natural, deliberate or accidental (such as a laboratory incident) causes.

Deliberate disease issues

Distinguishing between a natural occurrence of disease and an outbreak that has been deliberately induced may not always be a simple matter. In both cases, there may be considerable public health problems and a significant humanitarian catastrophe.

Responses to the alleged use of biological weapons should be capable of trying to find answers to a number of questions that go beyond the identification of a disease and its method of transmission in a natural outbreak. For example, even if a disease might sometimes naturally occur in an area, there may be questions about whether the spread of the disease in a particular situation had been artificially enhanced. A further set of questions would relate to whether there was any evidence of a delivery system, including a vector [such as an insect], used to spread the disease.

These questions may not be as simple as they seem at first sight as many answers to them would have to be distinguished from other possibilities that may appear to be very similar – such as a different, perhaps naturally occurring, illness that results in similar symptoms. However, answers to all of these questions would be needed to be able to deal in the most effective manner with a public health emergency that had been caused by the deliberate spread of disease as well as potentially contributing to identifying who might have caused the spread.

The Secretary-General's investigation mechanism

An issue that is likely to be raised during the week, and probably raised from a number of perspectives, is the ability of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) to investigate possible breaches of 'the 1925 Geneva Protocol or other relevant rules of customary international law'. Such investigations were carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s. While most of the investigations related to allegations of chemical warfare, the first and last investigations — in south-east Asia and Azerbaijan, respectively — involved allegations of use of toxins that fall within the remit of the BWC.

In the absence of any formal verification machinery for the BWC, the UNSG mechanism has received particular attention, including support from a number of states. However some states are concerned that the mechanism could be a distraction from other efforts to promote ideas for verification arrangements for the Convention.

A set of guidelines for investigation arrangements were drawn up in 1989, in an era before concepts such as 'inspection mandate' and 'managed access' had been developed and adopted in other regimes. One of the primary advantages of the Secretary-General's mechanism is its simplicity. UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/288, adopted 8 September 2006, encouraged 'the Secretary-General to update the roster of experts and laboratories, as well as the technical guidelines and procedures, available to him for the timely and efficient investigation of alleged use'. This is being acted upon. Governments involved in this process are likely to indicate their contributions during the Meeting.

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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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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.

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Wednesday 25th August 2010

The Second Day: National Efforts and Posters

The 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC/BWC) continued on Tuesday morning, with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. However, the activities of the day had started an hour earlier than is usual for diplomatic meetings with the holding of a pre-meeting side event. This is a sign of increased interest in the Convention as in the recent past side events would only be held at lunchtimes. For this MX there are four scheduled side events before the start of the morning sessions as all of the available lunchtime slots have been filled.

In reporting the comments of the Chairman of the Meeting regarding sponsorship of experts in the last daily report, one sponsor was omitted – the European Union through its Joint Action in support of the BWC.

National efforts for assistance and coordination

The Working Sessions on Tuesday were on the subject of 'National efforts for assistance and coordination'. The session started in the morning and continued into the afternoon, although the meeting in the main room adjourned at 16.30 for the poster session.

Presentations were given in the following order: Japan, UK, Canada, European Union, Ukraine, UK, France, Nigeria, USA, UK, Canada, Kenya, Pakistan, Turkey, Canada and India. Some states spoke more than once as the subject matter of each presentation was different. 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>>. Official documents, such as working papers, are also available via the UN document server at <<http://documents.un.org>>.

A number of presentations were on the details of national activities and capabilities for responding to a biological weapons attack. Japan focused on technical aspects of disease surveillance and how this fed into effective response planning. The UK introduced its working paper (WP.7) on national activities. France and Turkey highlighted the restructuring that has recently taken place in national emergency response capabilities; in each case, the departmental or ministerial responsibilities have been reorganized. Some presentations made the connection between national disease surveillance and the International Health Regulations.

The United States spoke of the challenges presented by joint public health and law enforcement investigations, the subject of a working paper it had submitted (WP.1). This was a theme that had started with the first presentation by Canada – which had examined the role of Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and its use of microbiological sampling during large scale events such as the Winter Olympics – and continued with the third UK presentation – which examined investigations into anthrax cases, some of which were fatal, that had been caused by spores in skins for bongo drums and contaminated heroin.

The second presentation from the UK related to the inquiry was held into the leak of Foot and Mouth disease virus (FMDV) from facilities at Pirbright in 2008. The laboratory

concerned had a level-4 animal pathogens containment (the containment levels for human pathogens are rated by separate criteria and so this is a very different type of facility from a level-4 human pathogens laboratory). Significant physical defects and procedural lapses were identified which are now being corrected.

Some presentations overlapped with issues relating to assistance for national efforts. For example, Kenya and Pakistan identified how their public health surveillance mechanisms need to be augmented in line with international best practices but that expenditure needed for resources such as additional laboratory capacity was significant. Canada, referring to the G8 Global Partnership, noted that one element of a new strategy for 'Strengthening Global Biosecurity' prepared by Canada while holding the G8 Presidency this year; was the 'development and maintenance of appropriate and effective measures to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the deliberate misuse of biological agents'. India noted its involvement in many South-South assistance activities. The EU, speaking as an international organization, introduced the working paper (WP.5) submitted by Belgium on behalf of the EU on the subject of its cooperative initiatives to improve biosafety and biosecurity.

Poster session

Following the precedents set in the Meetings of Experts in 2008 and 2009, a poster session consisting of fifteen posters from a variety of creators such as official agencies of States Parties, professional bodies and NGOs on subject matter relating to this year's topics was held in the gallery space just outside Salle XIX – the room that the main sessions of this year's meetings are being held. An innovation this year was the holding of a drinks reception in the gallery space courtesy of the delegation of Japan and its Ambassador, Yasunori Hakayama.

A variety of subject matter was included in the posters, such as biosecurity, biorisk management, examples of training methods and details of national systems of States Parties.

Where electronic copies of the posters have been provided by the poster presenters, these will be placed on the ISU website.

Side events

There were two side events on Tuesday. The first, in the morning before the start of the day's formal events, was a workshop convened by the World Health Organization on the subject of the International Health Regulations (IHR). Presentations were given by Stella Chungong (WHO), Richard Lennane (BWC ISU), Max Hardiman (WHO) and Helge Hollmeyer (WHO). The workshop was chaired by Ali Mohammadi (WHO). Details of the IHR can be found at <<http://www.who.int/ihr/>>.

The second side event, held at lunchtime, was entitled 'Strengthening the Prohibition through Education: Experiences, Resources and Models'. This was convened by the University of Exeter and the Inter-Academy Panel and was sponsored by the Alfred P Sloan Foundation. Presentations were given by Brian Rappert (Exeter, UK), François Garraux (Department of Defence, Switzerland), Masamichi Minehata (Bradford, UK), Michael Barr (Newcastle, UK), David Friedman (Institute for National Security Studies, Israel), Åke Forsberg (Defence Research Agency, Sweden), Simon Whitby (Bradford) and Ben Rusek (National Academies of Sciences, USA). The event was chaired by Sergiy Komisarenko (Ukraine). A book containing contributions from a number of these presenters can be found at <http://epress.anu.edu.au/education_ethics.html>.

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Thursday 26th August 2010

The Third Day: International cooperation

The 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC/BWC) continued on Wednesday morning, with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. Again, there was an early start with a pre-meeting side event.

The Working Sessions

In the draft programme of work, the morning working session was to be on the subject of 'Provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations: health aspects' with the afternoon working session on 'Provision of assistance and coordination with relevant organizations: security aspects'. Where copies of contributions have been provided by those who delivered them, the ISU will place these on its website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>.

Presentations were given in Working Session 3 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), Sweden, the UK, Republic of Korea, Georgia and the USA, China, Germany and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and, after lunch, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Presentations were given in Working Session 4 by Germany, the UK, Nigeria, Switzerland and the USA, Interpol and the Netherlands, Canada and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Before the meeting adjourned, Ambassador Oyarce indicated there were three more presentations to be made in Working Session 4 which would be given on Thursday morning.

In international meetings there is a certain element of subjects being raised away from the session allocated for them. Sometimes this is simply pragmatic, a country might devote the substantial proportion of a presentation to the agenda subject but say a few words on a separate subject of the meeting rather than take the floor again later. In other cases this can be unavoidable, if an expert is only in Geneva at a particular time that material has to be presented then. The third day of this MX saw a greater drift between allocated subjects than normal. This has implications for the form of thematic analysis presented here. Rather than select presentations under the 'health aspects' and 'security aspects' themes, other themes have been chosen. Points raised during Wednesday's sessions that will fit in more readily with the analysis in later daily reports will be dealt with in the coming days.

International organizations relating to health

The WHO, OIE and FAO each described their activities in relation to assistance and coordination activities. Each has systems to identify unusual events. There is an arrangement between them – the Global Early Warning System (GLEWS) – which brings together officials and information from the three organizations on a daily basis to identify major animal diseases, some of which may affect humans. Each of the three bodies is able to provide expertise and other assistance to states through regional offices. The FAO gave details of its Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD). The WHO spoke of its recent arrangement with the UNODA regarding the UNSG mechanism (see below).

The UNSG mechanism

The UNODA described developments in relation to the mechanism by which the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) can investigate alleged use of biological weapons [see the first daily report for this MX for some background to this mechanism]. At January 2010 the roster included offers from 41 countries of 237 nominated experts and 42 laboratories. The process of updating the 1989 guidelines for investigations has focused on technical appendices relating to biological agents. Sweden described a training event held in Umea in 2009. Fourteen experts from the roster were involved in a range of activities including learning how the mechanism developed, practical issues of personal protection, investigation techniques and team-building. The UK introduced information from a working paper (WP.6) which described a seminar in London for experts nominated by the British government and the circulation of information within relevant government departments.

During the question and answer session that followed the UNODA presentation, South Africa indicated it was willing to nominate experts but wished to see the appendices to the guidelines before doing so. Questions from other States Parties included issues of laboratory accreditation and the geographical balance of roster experts in the training event. The answers were that the UNSG could not accredit laboratories himself and that a fair geographical balance had been achieved at for the training event.

Tabletop exercises

A number of tabletop exercises were described. Georgia and the USA outlined a workshop and exercise held in Tbilisi in May 2010 that is described in a joint working paper (WP.2). Black ICE II, was held by Switzerland and the USA in Montreaux in September 2009. Interpol and the Netherlands described an exercise held in Argentina in June 2010 and a joint exercise in the Netherlands planned for November 2010.

Post-exercise recommendations included: the need for better pre-incident planning, training and identification of potential resources that could be called upon; the need for agencies with different responsibilities to communicate more effectively (and also for those with similar responsibilities in neighbouring jurisdictions); and quicker disease identification.

Side events

There were two side events on Wednesday. Both were held in association with the Geneva Forum. The first, in the morning before the start of the day's formal events, was the launch of a report, 'Preparing for a Comprehensive Review of the CBM Mechanism at the Seventh BWC Review Conference', derived from three workshops sponsored by Germany, Norway and Switzerland. Presentations were given by Riccarda Torriani (Switzerland), Jon Erik Stromo (Norway), Filippa Lentzos (LSE) and Volker Beck (Germany). The event was chaired by Silvia Cattaneo (Geneva Forum). The report can be downloaded from <<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/topics/peasec/sec.html>>.

The second side event, held at lunchtime, was entitled 'Synthetic Biology: Engineering a Safer Future'. This was convened in association with the BWC ISU with sponsorship from the Government of Canada. The event was introduced by Silvia Cattaneo (Geneva Forum) and presentations were given by Jane Calvert (Edinburgh), Markus Schmidt (Organisation for International Dialogue and Conflict Management) and Eleonore Pawels (Woodrow Wilson International Center). The event was chaired by Piers Millett (ISU).

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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.

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Monday 29th August 2010

The Final Day: Wrapping up the meeting

The 2010 Meeting of Experts (MX) for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC/BWC) concluded its proceedings on Friday with Ambassador Pedro Oyarce of Chile in the Chair. Again, there was an early start with a pre-meeting side event.

The report of the meeting, which essentially details the procedural aspects, was adopted, together with the draft compilation of suggestions made during the meeting that would be appended to it. As the compilation is produced in the name of the Chair, it did not need to be gone through on a line-by-line basis by the meeting. Indeed, States Parties were encouraged to go through the compilation over the weekend and inform the Implementation Support Unit if they felt there were any suggestions that had been missed.

Substantive presentations on Thursday's topics were given by the European Union (as an international organization), Mexico, Romania and the UK in a short spillover session.

Universalization

Just before the adoption of the report from the MX, the Chairman gave a verbal report on progress towards universalization of the Convention. There was some regret that no countries had joined the BWC since the 2008 Meeting of States Parties (MSP). The accession of the Cook Islands announced on the last day of that meeting had brought the total of States Parties to 163, up from 155 at the time of the 2006 Review Conference decision on 'Promotion of Universalization'. However, Ambassador Oyarce noted that both Cameroon and Malawi had indicated that they had completed their internal procedures required for accession. Other states, such as Angola and Tanzania had started internal procedures and there were 'positive signs' from Côte d'Ivoire. A formal report on universalization will be given at the MSP in December.

Closing remarks and statements

In his closing remarks, Ambassador Oyarce noted that 150 of the 450 delegates present at the meeting had flown in from their countries – a high proportion for a meeting like this. He described this as showing commitment. Looking toward the 2011 Review Conference, he noted a need to discuss issues with 'no preconceived ideas' and a need to strengthen the ISU as part of enhancing the effectiveness of the Convention. As traditional, a number of delegations on behalf of the regional groupings gave brief closing statements.

Side event

There was one side event on Friday, held in the morning before the start of the working session, by Anupa Gupte, an independent researcher, on 'International Cooperation Mechanisms for Scientific, Technical and Technological matters of BWC Implementation'.

Reflections

A conscious effort is taken in writing these daily summaries to report the facts and not give opinion. However, there are many times that the question is raised – ‘so what do you think about what happened?’ While the role of a commentator should be to try to report what is happening in an impartial manner, there are times that this style of reporting does not convey some of the atmosphere of meetings. The following are some personal reflections that do not necessarily represent anyone’s views other than the author’s own.

The 2010 meetings are the last of the current inter-sessional process established by the 2006 Review Conference. This naturally leads to thoughts about what should happen in the Seventh Review Conference in 2011. The announcement of the nomination by the Western Group of Ambassador Paul van den IJssel (Netherlands) as President for the Conference creates a natural focal point for early informal discussions that are valuable contributors to success of a review. A reason for the success of 2006 was the early announcement of Ambassador Masood Khan (Pakistan) as President of that conference.

This was the third MX to have been completely open, following the precedents of 2008 and 2009, with none of the sessions held behind closed doors. Many of the sessions were also available on the web. While the intention of the ISU had been to webcast as much as possible, some technical complications had made it difficult to get every session online.

The inter-sessional process has had a rather limited remit. Observing international diplomacy for too many years can make even the most optimistic commentator cynical about what may be achieved in inter-governmental meetings. However, the 2010 Meeting of Experts was undoubtably a success within the terms of this remit, giving plenty to build upon at the Meeting of States Parties in December. This naturally leads to thoughts about how much more could have been done had the remit been more flexible.

One innovation this year was the holding of a parallel workshop on confidence-building measures (CBMs) organized under the EU Joint Action in support of the BWC. The workshop, aimed at assisting countries in understanding the processes involved in CBM submission, was thus not strictly part of the MX, not least because the remit from 2006 would not allow for it. There are advantages and disadvantages in holding a parallel event such as this. Clearly delegates cannot be in two places at once, but the target audience for the workshop would not be likely to travel to Geneva for a separate event nor, perhaps, to stay in Geneva for an extra day. Therefore, to attract the maximum attention from the target audience, there were distinct advantages to hold it during the week of the MX. Efforts were taken to minimize the effects on the MX by scheduling the parallel event in such a way as to reduce this impact. With the number of CBM returns at 70 for this year so far – the highest number of returns submitted in any single year – it is possible that some of the participants in the workshop will be able to submit their first returns before the end of the year.

The Geneva Protocol became the focus of more attention than in recent years as a number of delegations connected the UN Secretary-General’s mechanism to investigate alleged use of biological weapons specifically to breaches of the Protocol. While the BWC has gained eight States Parties since the end of 2006, three countries have become full parties to the Protocol during the same period. El Salvador, which had signed the Protocol in 1925, deposited its instrument of ratification in 2008. Slovenia and Costa Rica acceded in 2008 and 2009 respectively. It may be a pertinent time to consider what efforts could be made to further increase the membership and to promote the withdrawal of remaining reservations.

This is the sixth and final 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>>.

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