

Tuesday 13th August 2013

The first day: opening statements and CBM participation

Opening of the meeting

The Chair of the 2013 Meeting of Experts (MX), Judit Körömi of Hungary, opened the meeting on Monday morning, welcoming ‘experts who have travelled from many countries around the world’. She noted that the MX would continue with the ‘tried and tested working practices’ of the earlier meetings and the lines established by her predecessor, Ambassador Boujemâa Delmi of Algeria, who had been in the chair in 2012.

She noted that sponsorship had been provided by the European Union, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands, via the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), to assist the participation of representatives of seven States Parties – Benin, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Mongolia and Montenegro – and two signatories, Myanmar and Nepal.

Formal decisions were taken, such as adoption of the rules of procedure, admission of Israel and Namibia as observer states; and admission of the European Union, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Interpol, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health/OIE as international bodies.

Opening statements

Statements were made by Iran (for the non-aligned), Pakistan, Brazil, Russia, Malaysia, India, Mexico, Switzerland, Kenya, Algeria, Indonesia, Lithuania, Madagascar, China, Cuba, Philippines, Benin, Ecuador and Ghana; followed by the European Union as an international organization. Statements have been posted on the ISU website <<http://www.unog.ch/bwc>>. The statement by Benin was the first time that the country had addressed an inter-sessional meeting in plenary session. Themes from these statements will be discussed in these reports under the relevant sections of the programme of work this week.

Some States Parties had been aiming to reduce the number of broad political opening statements at the experts meeting on the reasoning that these are more suitable for the Meeting of States Parties (MSP) later in the year and time at the MX is better spent on practical issues. Therefore, a number of countries took an active decision not to make an opening statement but to focus their preparations on the working sessions on particular topics. However, it should be noted that statements do not solely serve a purpose of communicating information to other participants in the meeting. Making a statement has other, more subtle, benefits. For example, making a statement in the name of a government requires that government to agree to a text – meaning that BWC issues get on the agenda of senior figures in that government as they approve the statement. This is particularly important if new or additional BWC-related activities are being undertaken a national level – it can assist those promoting such activities to be able to indicate during national policy processes that the outcomes will be referred to in a public statement.

NGO statements

Non-governmental organizations addressed the meeting in an informal session. A statement from the University of Bradford was given just before the lunch break. After lunch, statements were given by: the International Network of Engineers and Scientists; Landau Network Centro Volta and the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre; Verification, Research Training and Information Centre; Pax Christi International; the Biosecurity Working Group of the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues; and the University of London. These statements have been posted on the ISU website.

First working session – Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

The rest of the afternoon's session was dedicated to 'How to enable fuller participation in the CBMs', the first of two sessions on this topic. This was a much more interactive session than similar working sessions had been in earlier MXs. Statements or interventions were made by Iran (for the non-aligned), UK, Canada, South Africa, USA, ISU, Brazil, Germany, India, Mexico, Kenya, Netherlands, Cuba, Pakistan, Switzerland, Belarus and Australia, with some states taking the floor more than once. South Africa (WP.10), UK (WP.3) and USA (WP.9) introduced working papers they had prepared.

There was considerable discussion about what CBMs were for. About the only point that was universally accepted was that CBMs were no substitute for verification. It was suggested that if there was some lack of clarity about what was achieved through the CBM system, this might be an influence on why the returns were usually barely more than a third of the States Parties. Several delegations noted that 2013 had, thus far, seen a drop in CBM submissions (the current total stands at 53 compared with a total of 69 for 2012; the due date for the annual returns being 15 April). South Africa noted that it had never checked any other country's CBM nor had been asked any questions about its return by any other State Party. This prompted a question by the USA that was essentially: if CBMs are not widely read, how do they enhance confidence? Issues of language barriers and the costs of translation were raised, as CBMs remain only in the language of submission, although Canada has voluntarily funded translations of some returns by other countries in recent years.

References were made to the original decision to establish a system of CBMs taken at the Second BWC Review Conference in 1986 which read: 'agrees that the States Parties are to implement, on the basis of mutual co-operation, the following measures, in order to prevent or reduce the occurrence of ambiguities, doubts and suspicions, and in order to improve international co-operation in the field of peaceful bacteriological (biological) activities'. Iran reminded the MX that CBMs have this second pillar of improving international cooperation that is often overlooked. The UK noted the decision was that 'States Parties *are* to implement' CBMs, suggesting this was a key indicator that CBMs were not intended to be a voluntary arrangement. It is the position of a number of governments that participation in the CBM arrangements is a voluntary activity.

Side event and poster session

A lunchtime event was convened by Kings College London to launch a report 'Hard to Prove: Compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention' with presentations by Filippa Lentzos, Susan Martin and Wyn Bowen (all KCL) and chaired by Ambassador Matthew Rowland (UK). The report is at <www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/kpi/projects/secdefence/BWC-report2013.pdf>.

After the afternoon's formal proceedings a poster session on subjects relevant to the topics under discussion at the MX was held. Where electronic copies of the posters have been provided by the poster presenters these will be placed on the ISU website.

This is the second report from the Meeting of Experts for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which is being held from 12 to 16 August 2013 in Geneva. The reports are prepared by Richard Guthrie on behalf of the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP). Copies of the reports are available via the BWPP website at <<http://www.bwpp.org>>.

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