

Tuesday 1st August 2023

## Setting the scene for the substantive sessions of the BWC Working Group

The Second Session of the Working Group (WG) on the strengthening of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC/BTWC) is scheduled to convene in Geneva from 7 to 18 August 2023. The Group was established by a decision of the Ninth BWC Review Conference held at the end of 2022.

The First Session met during March 2023 to discuss organizational issues and appointed Ambassador Flávio Damico (Brazil) as Chair of the Working Group with Ambassador Camille Petit (France) and Irakli Jgenti (Georgia) as Vice-Chairs, each of whom is in post until the end of 2024. The First Session also adopted an agenda for the Working Group and an indicative programme of work for the substantive sessions.

Documents and statements (where those giving them have wanted them posted) from the Second Session will be posted to the official webpage for the Session at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/67451>. Official BWC documents are also available via <https://documents.un.org>. A number of working papers have been published and more are expected.

### Topics and facilitators

The 'Bureau' – the body composed of the office holders that administers the Working Group – has appointed facilitators to assist in each of the topic areas to be discussed by the Working Group. It is possible that further facilitators will be appointed over time.

There are seven topics for discussion at the Working Group with two potential mechanisms to be considered. The seven topics [and the facilitators for each] are:

- (a) international cooperation and assistance under Article X [JJ Domingo (Philippines) and Thomas Fetz/Trevor Smith (Canada)];
- (b) scientific and technological (S&T) developments relevant to the BWC [Grisselle Rodríguez (Panama), Peter Ahabwe/Musa Kwehangana (Uganda), Vincent Bodson (Belgium) and Ljupčo Gjorgjinski (North Macedonia)];
- (c) confidence-building and transparency [Angel Horna (Peru) and Laurent Masméjean (Switzerland)];
- (d) compliance and verification [Alonso Martínez (Mexico) and Ambassador Robert Bosch (Netherlands)];
- (e) national implementation of the Convention [Grisselle Rodríguez (Panama), Athikarn Dilogwathana (Thailand), Reski Ilahi (Indonesia), Faith Bagamuhunda (Uganda) and Michelle Carr (Australia)];
- (f) assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII [Angel Dalmazzo (Argentina) and Sofie Kallehauge (Denmark)]; and
- (g) organizational, institutional and financial arrangements [Husham Ahmed (Pakistan), Ambassador Ichiro Ogasawara/Shigeru Umetsu (Japan) and Arsen Omarov (Kazakhstan)].

The first two topics are those which have proposals for implementation mechanisms associated with them which will be the subject of additional discussions.

The selection of topics represents the breadth of issues that BWC delegations have felt need developing in order to strengthen the Convention and there is a widespread

recognition that any consensus efforts for strengthening of the Convention will require action in each of the topic areas. As with many other multilateral issues, there are diverse perspectives on the emphasis placed on each of the topics and elements within them.

### **Activities during the Second Session**

The First Session agreed that Monday 7 to Wednesday 9 August will be dedicated to topic (a) international cooperation and assistance/Article X with the Thursday focused on the proposal for mechanism for implementation in this issue area. Friday 11, Monday 14 and Tuesday 15 August will discuss topic (b) on S&T developments with Wednesday 16 looking at proposals for a mechanism to review S&T developments. The final two days of the Second Session – Thursday 17 and Friday 18 – will focus on issues of national implementation as topic (e).

During July, the Chair circulated an indicative programme of work with further details which includes time for remarks from facilitators for each topic and panels to enhance discussion.

The initial week of the Second Session will be running in parallel with the Preparatory Committee for the next Review Conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that is meeting during 31 July-11 August in Vienna. Countries that are states parties to both treaties, especially those with smaller disarmament delegations, may find their resources stretched for the overlapping week.

### **Topics and dates for subsequent sessions**

The Third Session is scheduled for 4-8 December 2023 and will be immediately followed by the annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP). The Third Session includes time allocated for (c) confidence-building and transparency (one day), (d) compliance and verification (three days) and (g) organizational, institutional and financial arrangements (one day).

Dates for the BWC meetings in 2024 have been proposed as 12-23 August for the Fourth Session and 2-6 December for the Fifth. The 2024 MSP would then follow the Fifth Session. The Fourth Session is scheduled to start with discussion of topic (f) assistance, response and preparedness under Article VII, following which topics previously discussed will be returned to.

### **Outputs from the Working Group**

Paragraph 16 of the Final Document of the Ninth BWC Review Conference, states that '[a]t the completion of its work' the WG is to 'adopt a report, by consensus, that includes conclusions and recommendations according to its mandate'. The report is to be presented for consideration at the Tenth Review Conference (scheduled for 2027), 'or earlier at a Special Conference if it is requested according to the procedure established by the Third Review Conference (BWC/CONF.III/23), to decide on any further action'.

The challenges of reaching consensus in the final week of the Ninth Review Conference meant that there were a number of things added to the Working Group in a form of consensus by deferral. The lack of time at the Ninth Review Conference to get into details of how the Working Group would operate has left open a question of how much detail the WG needs to get into on any proposed measures. In other words, should the Working Group simply outline what are the collection of measures that would strengthen the Convention under each topic in order for a follow-on process to elaborate them further or should the Working Group propose detailed measures?

In addition to the final substantive report of the Working Group, there will be a procedural report from each Session, in line with BWC past practice. No time has been specifically allocated within each Session for this task in the expectation that preparation and adoption of a procedural report should not take much time.

*These reports have been produced by the BioWeapons Prevention Project (BWPP) for all BWC meetings with NGO registration since the Sixth Review Conference (2006). They are available from <<https://www.bwpp.org/reports.html>> and <<https://www.cbw-events.org.uk/bwc-rep.html>>. A subscription link is available on each webpage. Financial support for reporting for the Second Session of the Working Group has been gratefully received from Global Affairs Canada. The reports are written by Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, who is solely responsible for their contents <[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>.*