

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings June/July 2015
Chairman's Speaking Notes

Group of NAM and Other States: 10.30, Monday 29 June 2015, Room V

Western Group: 14:00, Thursday 2 July 2015, Room XXI

Eastern European Group: 16:00, Thursday 2 July 2015, Room XXI

- Thanks to the Coordinator for convening this meeting and to all Representatives for the support in our work this year. [ONLY FOR EEG GROUP: I would like to congratulate Kazakhstan for its nomination as coordinator of the Eastern European Group, and I would also like to thank Hungary for its dedication and support as the previous group coordinator]. [ONLY FOR NAM AND WESTERN GROUP: I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that Kazakhstan is the new coordinator of the Eastern European Group].
- I am privileged to enjoy working with two highly experienced Vice-chairs, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast of the Netherlands and Ambassador György Molnár, Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non Proliferation of Hungary. Ambassador van der Kwast was not able to join us today and Ambassador Molnár was not able to come to Geneva, but I am happy that Mr. David Pusztai is able to represent Ambassador Molnár.
- In my recent letter, dated 27 May which was sent to all Permanent Missions, to all designated National Contact Points and which is also posted on the BWC website, I have outlined my intentions with regard to the organization of the forthcoming Meeting of Experts, in accordance also with the practice followed by the three previous Chairs.
- I have two main aims for our consultations today:
 - To share with you progress made in preparing for the Meeting of Experts and to get a clearer sense of how you see these arrangements; and
 - To hear your views as to how we should deal with the part of our mandate to promote effective action given that this is the final year of the intersessional programme before the Eighth Review Conference.

Preparations for the Meeting of Experts

[Briefing given by Mr. Daniel Feakes, Head of the BWC ISU]

- The 27 May letter was self-explanatory. Copies are available in the room if you have not yet received one, and it is also available on the BWC website.
- Registration for the Meeting of Experts is now open and the first official documents have been posted on the BWC website and more will follow in the coming weeks. I will provide more details shortly.

Provisional programme of work

- Attached to the letter was a draft provisional programme of work for the Meeting of Experts. It is closely based upon those we adopted in 2012, 2013 and 2014, updated to reflect the 2015 topical subject for the standing agenda item on science and technology. As with last year's programme, it includes the biennial item on strengthening Article VII.
- The provisional programme of work maintains the balance between the various agenda items with one full day (or two working sessions) for each of the Standing Agenda Items and two working sessions, over non-consecutive days, for the biennial topic.
- Like last year, there is only a single session to open the meeting and hear introductory remarks. I would therefore kindly request delegations to keep any introductory remarks as short as possible or, insofar as possible, to make your general observations in December when we meet as States Parties, so that we can move on to the expert discussions as quickly as possible. I would be grateful if you could convey this message to your capital. Please contact the ISU if you wish to make a general statement.

Other participants

- Also attached to the letter was a list of United Nations entities, international organizations and Guests of the Meeting that we think would be useful to have present at the Meeting of Experts. We would welcome any thoughts you might have on this list or suggestions for additional participants that may help us in our work. We have since received an additional request from a State Party to include the University of Bradford as a guest of the meeting to brief on issues relating to education.
- In general, for the standing agenda items, we are proposing that we set aside the first hour and a half of the afternoon session on each topic for contributions by relevant guests. For the biennial item, we are suggesting that we start by hearing what capacity already exists in other forums, and have set aside time to do this at the start of the first session on Monday. We will then revisit this item on Friday morning to focus on the capacity present in States Parties.

Sponsorship Programme

- I would also like to highlight that thanks to recent contributions by Australia, Finland and the Netherlands there are funds available to sponsor participation at the Meeting of Experts. The application deadline has now passed, and the Chair is now considering the list of applications in accordance with the criteria established by the Seventh Review Conference. For applications received after the deadline, requests will be considered for future meetings.
- It is usual that demand for such sponsorship outstrips available resources, so I would encourage any State in a position to do so, to contribute to this important programme. At the same time we take this opportunity to convey our appreciation to those States Parties that have already contributed.

Background papers

- The ISU is producing three background papers:
 - One updating a past paper on the role of international organizations in the provision of assistance relevant to Article VII;
 - A second detailing previous agreements and understandings relevant to strengthening Article VII; and
 - A third enumerating some challenges and obstacles to developing international cooperation, assistance and exchange.
- Advance copies of all three papers will be posted on the BWC website when available.

Rolling, detailed indicative schedule

- As in previous years, the Chair requested the ISU to compile an informal rolling, detailed indicative schedule which combines details from the programme of work, with up-to-date information on side events, suggested panels for guests of the meeting, as well as a slot for the poster session. As additional information becomes available we will include proposed and confirmed contributions from States, international organizations and guests of the meeting. The schedule will shortly be posted on the BWC website. It is an indicative document provided for your ease of reference which will be updated as regularly as possible by the ISU. However, it is not an official document and should not be taken as a final schedule.

Side events

- We have received several requests for side events, but we have not yet filled all the available slots. If any other States Parties are planning to request a side event, please, contact us as soon as possible. As in previous years, the aim is to achieve a balanced series of side events covering the full scope of the issues to be addressed by the Meeting of Experts.
- The ISU has been informed that Biosecurity Working Group of IAP – The Global Network of Science Academies and the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will organize a workshop on the subject of this year's topical science and technology item. The event will take place just before the Meeting of Experts, on 9 August. The workshop is open to delegations and information about participation is available on the "Latest Information" page of the BWC website.

Poster session

- We would also like to highlight the poster session which is planned for the evening of the first day of the meeting, 10 August. Such a session has been conducted in previous years and is an excellent way to foster interactions between participants and to explore relevant topics in a more relaxed atmosphere. We encourage States Parties, international organizations and NGOs to prepare posters to be displayed at the session.

[the Chair takes the floor again]

Promoting “effective action”

- As you are all very aware, the purpose of our intersessional programme is to “to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action” on those issues identified for inclusion by the Seventh Review Conference. Since 2012, we have discussed many issues, and have promoted common understandings on many of them. However, we have been less successful when it comes to the “effective action” part of our mandate.
- With the Eighth Review Conference a little over one year away, I believe it is important for us to focus more explicitly on promoting “effective action”. Our deliberations at the Meeting of Experts and particularly at the Meeting of States Parties should be conducted with a view to providing solid input for the Review Conference next year.
- Reviewing the reports of previous Meetings of States Parties, it is clear that there are some areas in which effective action can be promoted. I believe it will be important for us to focus on such areas within our mandate for this year with a view to being able to include more concrete and specific language in the report of this year’s Meeting of States Parties.
- While promoting effective action is something we can further consider at the Meeting of States Parties, I am raising it now, in order that we can use the available time as constructively as possible.
- I would welcome any reflections you might have or any ideas of how best we might proceed.

The biennial agenda item on strengthening Article VII

- With respect to the biennial agenda item, our current mandate is “How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties”. We have firm foundations on which to build and I believe it would be best to continue the efforts States Parties have already begun.
- We have already reached a number of relevant agreements at past review conferences, notably at the Seventh Review Conference. There were also relevant common understandings identified during our intersessional work:
 - In 2004 we looked at “capabilities for responding to, investigating and mitigating the effects of cases of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons or suspicious outbreaks of disease”;
 - In 2010, we looked at “the 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”;
 - And in 2014 we began our exploration of the topic that we will continue to explore this year.
- The report of the 2014 Meeting of States Parties identified five areas in particular for continued discussion this year:
 - Challenges to strengthening the implementation of Article VII and ways to address them;

- Appropriate means of coordination between States Parties and relevant international organizations and ensuring effective coordination and cooperation with and between relevant international organizations, in accordance with their mandates and upon request by a State Party;
 - What assistance might be needed by a State exposed to danger as a result of activities prohibited by the Convention if its national means and resources have been overwhelmed;
 - What information might be provided in terms of clear procedures for submitting requests for assistance or for responding to a case of alleged use of biological or toxin weapons; and
 - Options for strengthening the procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance.
- I believe that these five areas identified by the 2014 Meeting of States Parties for further discussion could provide a useful guide for our deliberations on Article VII this year. We will also need to discuss the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa and its implications for the Convention.
 - I hope that at the Meeting of States Parties we could then work together to identify options within each of these five areas for promoting “effective action”, particularly with a view to crafting useful input for the Eighth Review Conference next year.
 - I am of course very interested to hear your feedback on these ideas and your views in general as to how we can make further progress in our consideration of the biennial item.

Other issues

Confidence-Building Measures

- As in my letter, I would again like to take this opportunity to remind and encourage all States Parties to submit their CBM returns covering calendar year 2014. The ISU has informed me that to date it has received 59 returns, slightly below the average for this time of year. Although the 15 April deadline for CBM submission has passed, CBMs can still be submitted to the ISU at any time. I would also like to remind States Parties of the offers of assistance in compiling CBMs that are listed in the cooperation and assistance database, and of the advice and guidance materials available on the BWC website, and from the ISU.

Universalization

- As you are aware, the BWC now has 173 States Parties with the accessions earlier this year by Mauritania and Andorra. We have received encouraging news regarding some other States, particularly Angola where the Parliament recently approved accession to the BWC. For my part, I have so far held bilateral meetings with 12 Permanent Representatives of non-States Parties here in Geneva.

- I would encourage States Parties in a position to do so to promote universalization of the BWC in their contacts with non-States Parties and to keep me and the ISU informed of any relevant developments in order that our activities are well coordinated. I cannot highlight enough how important information sharing and coordination is in our common efforts in promoting universalization. It is important that I and the ISU are informed about your efforts, both to have them reflected in my report on universalization activities and in order to maximize our efforts and avoid duplication.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, I would like to hear any feedback you may have on my recent letter or the remarks I made today.
- I am particularly interested in your thoughts as to how we might more explicitly capture efforts to promote effective action and on my approach to our biennial item.
- I am keen to continue to consult with delegations on an ongoing basis. I need to hear your opinions, what you like, and what you do not. This is your process and I see my job as helping you make the most of it.
- Finally, I look forward to working with you all to ensure an efficient, effective and productive Meeting of Experts, and a valuable continuation of our intersessional programme.

I would now like to give the floor to the Head of the ISU, Mr Daniel Feakes, for some administrative announcements.

[Daniel Feakes to make some short announcements]

I would now like to open the floor for any comments and feedback that you may wish to share at this time.