

Biological Weapons Convention: Regional Group Meetings, 29 November 2011

President-designate's Speaking Notes

Group of NAM and Other States: 15:00, Room XXI

Western Group: 16:00, Room XXI

Eastern European Group: 17:00, Room XXI

Introduction

- Thank you for convening this meeting. I wanted to have a final opportunity to update delegations on preparations for the Review Conference, and to answer any questions you may have, before we open our meeting next week.
- I would like to thank delegations for their cooperation and support so far, and I think we are well placed for the conference.
 - In particular, I would like to thank all delegations which have submitted working papers. We have 26 so far, and this has given us all a valuable chance to examine and consider a range of proposals.
 - I would also like to thank all those delegations which participated in the open-ended consultations I convened on science and technology and on the next intersessional process. I will hold another open-ended consultation tomorrow in Room XVI from 15.00 to 17.00, on assistance and cooperation, and I look forward to seeing you there.
- There are three things I would like to do in this meeting:
 - First, to introduce the provisional indicative programme of work. I am keen to ensure that we start our work next week with a clear understanding of the general approach we will take to structure our deliberations.
 - Second, to provide some information on practical arrangements for our work next week, especially for the opening morning, to help ensure we get off to a smooth start.
 - Third, to hear any questions, comments, complaints, suggestions or other feedback you might have.

Provisional indicative Programme of Work

- Attached to my letter of 17 November, I circulated to delegations a draft provisional indicative programme of work. I have now submitted that draft and it is available from the ISU website as an official document (BWC/CONF.VII/2).
 - I stress that the programme is both provisional and indicative. It is there to guide and facilitate our work, not to constrain us. We will need to be ready to adapt it as our work develops.
- Looking at the programme, you will see that following the opening formalities on Monday morning, we will hold the general debate.
 - The list of speakers for the general debate has been open since Tuesday 8 November and many states have already inscribed themselves on it.

- Should your delegation wish to make a statement in the general debate, and you have not already done so, please inform Mr. Richard Lennane or send an email to bwc@unog.ch.
- In line with our usual working arrangements, we will hear first from representatives of groups of States Parties, then from individual States Parties, followed by signatories, then observer states, and then observer agencies.
- Given that a large number of States Parties are expected to take part in the general debate, I have requested that statements be kept to a limited duration, ideally 5 minutes, and not exceeding a maximum of 7 minutes. Those speaking on behalf of groups may have longer, but are still requested to keep under 10 minutes.
- When we have concluded our general debate, we will begin the substantive work of the review conference. The programme envisages that the first stage of our efforts will run from the middle of the first week until the middle of the second week and will comprise two main forums: the Committee of the Whole, and informal plenaries.
 - The Committee of the Whole: will deal with the article-by-article review of the Convention (agenda items 10 (b) and (c)), looking at each article in turn, and developing text for the Final Declaration part of the final document.
 - Informal plenaries: will deal with "cross-cutting" issues that do not fit under a single article of the Convention, and with specific issues needing decisions, e.g. because they were explicitly mandated by the Sixth Review Conference (agenda items 11-13). The informal plenaries will develop text for the "decisions and recommendations" or "forward-looking agenda" part of the final document.
 - I would characterise this division of labour as follows: the Committee of the Whole produces text that records *what has happened, what the situation is, and what the States Parties think about it*. The informal plenaries produce text that specifies *what the States Parties are going to do about it*.
- Once work in these two settings is complete, or at least sufficiently well-developed, we will then hold a formal plenary to adopt the report of the Committee of the Whole, and then convene the Drafting Committee.
 - The Drafting Committee will work to refine the text passed on to it from the Committee of the Whole, as well as the draft decisions developed by the informal plenaries.
 - Depending on the situation, I might appoint facilitators or friends of the chair on specific issues, and assign them pieces of the emerging text for further development. Naturally, I do not yet know which issues might benefit from such an approach, but I am asking for your understanding and support should this become necessary.
 - I am hopeful that by the middle of the third week, we will be in a position to adopt the report of the Drafting Committee and will have all the substantive elements of our final document.
- As you will see on the programme, I am being *ambitious* in hoping we will be in a position to adopt our final document in a plenary session during the afternoon of Wednesday 21 December. I am, however, also being *realistic* and have ensured that we will have time available on Thursday 22 December to continue our work if necessary.
- I would also like to provide a few more details on three informal events included on the provisional indicative programme of work:

- You will note that in line with previous review conferences, I intend to suspend the meeting at 16.30 on Tuesday 7 December to allow NGOs an opportunity to address delegations.
- During my consultations, States Parties have repeatedly stressed the importance of better involving industry in the work of the Convention. As a result, I have organised a discussion panel from 10.00 to 11.00 on Thursday 8 December for members of the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and synthetic biology industries. I intend to suspend our formal work to allow us to participate in these discussions as freely as possible.
- I am also planning to suspend our formal work to allow us all to take part in the poster session planned from 17.00 on Thursday 8 December. Similar events proved very popular during our intersessional work and I am keen to use these informal meetings to improve interaction between delegations and facilitate the sharing of ideas and proposals.
- We will adopt the provisional indicative programme of work at our opening meeting on Monday, but I again stress that this is only a guide for our work: nothing is set in stone.
 - I will work closely with the General Committee (Bureau) in managing the programme as our work develops, and will keep all States Parties fully informed.
 - The programme envisages a brief meeting at the end of each week, at which we will see where we are up to, and review the programme for the coming week.

Practical matters

- I would like to begin the conference promptly at 10am next Monday, and so would encourage delegations to take their seats a little earlier than that.
- When we open the meeting there are a number of administrative matters we will need to deal with, such as electing officials and adopting the agenda, programme of work and rules of procedure. I am hoping that, given our preparations and the understandings reached at the Preparatory Committee, we will be able to move swiftly through this part of our agenda.
- We will then hear a short video message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
- This will be followed by short addresses from two special guests I have invited to speak at the opening of our conference, in order to bring us some perspectives from the wider world of biological science and technology, and to remind us of the importance of the role of the scientific community in supporting the aims and objectives of the Convention:
 - A leading international scientist, Professor Indira Nath from India, will talk to us about the responsible conduct of science. Professor. Nath's research is mainly on the immunology of infectious diseases and she is a prominent member of the InterAcademy Council and has been awarded the UNESCO award for Women in Science.
 - Ms. Esther Ng, from Singapore, who is the winner of a global essay competition we have held for young scientists on the responsible conduct in the life sciences, the importance of safety and security, and the role for international collaboration in the biological sciences. Ms. Ng will read her winning entry.

- Once we have heard these brief addresses, we will then proceed straight into the general debate, which will run through the rest of Monday and Tuesday – and which may be re-opened later in the week if there are delegations which for one reason or another were unable to speak during the initial session.
- It is my intention to hold the first meeting of the General Committee (or Bureau) of the review conference at 09.00 on Tuesday 6 December in Room XXVII.
- We have a packed schedule of side events at the conference, and I encourage delegations to make the most of these opportunities to inform themselves on a range of relevant issues and activities.
 - In particular, I would like to highlight the event at Monday lunchtime, where the United Kingdom and Switzerland will open their exhibition of glass microbe sculptures and we will award the prize for the young scientist essay contest.
- Finally, on behalf of the Presidency, the Swiss Government, and the Geneva authorities, I have the pleasure to invite all delegations to a reception at the Vieux Bois at the close of business of the first day of our review conference.

Conclusion

- Thank you. That is all I wanted to say. Let me emphasize again that throughout the review conference I am always available for consultations, with individual delegations or groups.
 - Now I would like to hear from you: your views, comments, questions and feedback – on the substantive issues, the work programme, or any other aspect of preparations for the Conference.
 - The more I know about your interests and concerns, the better I will be able to help you achieve your desired outcomes. I am committed to working with all States Parties to build consensus, but I cannot solve problems if I don't know about them.
 - I remain confident that we are on track to deliver a strong consensus outcome that embodies *ambitious realism* and genuinely strengthens the BWC.
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