

PrepCom: Setting the Stage for the 'Eighth' Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention

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Summary

In April 2016 the Preparatory Committee meeting for the Eighth Review Conference was concluded. This will be followed by another meeting in August 2016. Two major points were discussed during the April meeting, the issue of science and technology and effective inter-
sessional process.

On April 26, 2016, the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting for the Eighth Review Conference (RevCon) of the Biological Weapons Convention (or BWC) jump-started the Convention's quinquennial review process which is scheduled to be held in Geneva from November 7 to 25 this year. The two-day PrepCom meeting in April, while setting the necessary procedural arrangements for the successful conduct of Eighth RevCon, focused on the 'general exchange of views' on matters of BWC and the organizational aspects of the forthcoming RevCon such as the Presidency, the distribution of posts of Chairs and Vice-Chairs and the draft Rules of Procedure. The second session of PrepCom meeting will reconvene again from August 8 to 12 this year, when the States Parties will deliberate all provisions of the Convention.

The first session of PrepCom meeting witnessed participation of at least 86 States Parties, one State neither party nor signatory to the Convention, one regional intergovernmental organization and eight non-governmental organizations. In addition, Ambassador Gyorgy Molnar of Hungary was elected as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee as well as nominated to act as President of the forthcoming Eighth Review Conference. Ambassador Michael Biontino of Germany and Ambassador Boudjemâa Delmi of Algeria were elected as Vice-Chairmen. There was also understanding among the various Regional Groups on the posts of Vice-Presidents of the Conference as well as Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the subsidiary bodies (e.g. 'Committee of the Whole, "Drafting committee" and "Credential committee"). At least 20 Vice Presidents were nominated for the Conference dominated by the Group of the

Non-Aligned Movement and Other States with 10, followed by the Western Group with 6.

There were 29 Statements presented at the PrepCom that included regional groups (Non Aligned Movement) represented by Iran, and other specific statements by State parties such as India, Finland, United States, Russia, UK, France, China, Switzerland, Indonesia, Norway, Italy, Australia, Ireland, Japan, Germany, Canada, Morocco, Mexico, Cuba, Pakistan, Armenia, Belarus, The Netherlands, Peru, Republic of Korea and the European Union. Iran also issued its official statement at the PrepCom.

While many of these statements made references to previous Working Papers (WPs) submitted at the BWC meetings the April PrepCom meeting, saw submission of at least 12 Working Papers. The Russian Federation has submitted two WPs on the Operationalisation of Mobile Biomedical Units to deliver protection against biological weapons, investigate their alleged use, and to suppress epidemics of various etiologies and on the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Committee. The US, Switzerland, and United Kingdom (and Northern Ireland) and the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden submitted WPs focussing on the Science and technology review for the BWC. The US too submitted working papers on strengthening confidence building and consultative mechanisms under the Biological Weapons Convention. Another important WP was submitted by France, on the Specificities of the Response to Natural and Intentional Disease Outbreaks.

Two issues dominated the April PrepCom meeting: proposals relating to the issue of a science & technology review mechanism and a renewed call for a more effective inter-sessional process. However, the August meeting is anticipated to be more exciting

where the ISU is charged with preparing papers on topics like 'history and operation of the confidence-building measures' agreed and revised so far at the previous Review Conferences (2nd, 3rd and 7th RevCons), the financial implications of proposals for follow-up action after the Eighth Review Conference; the common understandings reached by the Meetings of States Parties (MSPs) during the last intersessional programmes (2012 to 2015), and the status of universalization of the Convention.