The "Intersessional Bureau": a new element to solidify BWC work in Geneva

Submitted by Germany

I. Introduction

1. Decision-making and giving the BWC work in Geneva a more robust structure are both issues that have been raised many times since the Fifth Review Conference in 2001/2002. The creation of an Implementation Support Unit (ISU) in 2006 has somewhat accentuated the need for more coordination amongst States Parties. In addition, it is generally recognised that the interactions of the three regional groups in Geneva between themselves, with the ISU and the (designate) annual chairman are in need of restructuring. After the creation of the ISU in 2006 and attempts to review the whole intersessional process, the question of how to organise “decision-making” and redesign the overall set-up has been addressed over and over again, but no conclusion has been found yet.

2. For these and a number of other reasons this paper is supposed to serve as a point for reflection. It tries to put the idea of creating an “Intersessional Bureau” in the context of responding to needs for increased coordination with the ISU and the chairman. Moreover, it tries to offer a new framework for enhancing BWC work among the three regional groups in Geneva.

II. Assumptions, expectations and possible solutions

3. This working paper is based on the following assumptions:

   (a) The intersessional process formula (expert meeting in August/States Parties meeting in December) will remain the same.

   (b) Budget, size and mandate of the ISU will remain by and large the same, i.e. no fundamental changes are likely to be made.

   (c) Participation and interest of States Parties remain more or less at the same level.

   (d) Lack of regular political feedback to ISU and chairman beyond their bilateral contacts.

   (e) Involvement of Geneva-based diplomacy is crucial for BWC work; i.e. a higher degree of involvement among CD/UN diplomacy for BWC work in Geneva should be achieved.

   (f) A new approach to activating BWC work between the three regional groups should be achieved.

4. Adding new and attractive themes, and including other actors and stakeholders:

   (a) One likely outcome of the Seventh Review Conference could be a reshaped intersessional work schedule, which, in turn, will require a new organisational framework for BWC activities in Geneva.
Experts from academia and industry, in particular the biotech industry and the life sciences, need to be included in BWC work. In particular, participation from industry should be enhanced.

5. Enlarging the base for States Parties’ participation:

(a) Currently, confidence-building measures and annual meetings driven by exchange of experts' views are the only practical tools that we have at our disposal. However, participation, including submission of confidence-building measures, is not more than 90 to 100 States Parties.

(b) Participation beyond CBM submissions requires some concrete activity.

(c) Decision-making is introduced in discussions as one tool to increase interest in BWC activities. Decision-making under the Convention can be done by a majority, but States Parties prefer deciding on the basis of "consensus". However, legitimate decision-making binding all States Parties to the Convention requires a higher degree of participation in BWC work.

(d) The idea of adding an “Intersessional Bureau” could be one component to enhance participation.

III. The "Intersessional Bureau"

6. After the Review Conference any new work structure will lead to more activity and interaction as well as an enhanced organisational framework. The “Intersessional Bureau” could assist the ISU and the chairman to identify and select experts and representatives from academia and industry to participate in meetings of the reshaped intersessional process and advise the ISU and the chairman in organizational matters. In addition, it could advise the ISU and the chairman how to proceed with issues which extend beyond purely administrative procedures and may also have some political connotation, such as universality and national implementation outreach activities, screening of CBM participation, handling of assistance/cooperation requests and offers, etc.

7. The Intersessional Bureau should consist of representatives from the regional groups, including the group coordinators, the three depositaries and the designate chairman as members and the head of the ISU as its secretary. Two or three sessions before the Meeting of Experts would be ideal to adequately bridge the long stretch between January and August.

8. It is hoped that this structure would give BWC work a good “corset” and ensure the continuity of States Parties work when there are no formal sessions.