

Government and Industry Discuss CW Ban in Canberra

Government officials from over 65 countries and chemical industry representatives from over 30 countries met in Canberra, Australia, September 18-22, 1989, to discuss the proposed ban on chemical weapons. The purpose of the conference was twofold: to strengthen the government-industry bond in the pursuit of a total ban on the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons (CW); and to draw attention to national and industrial responsibilities until the CW negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva are concluded and a CW Convention enters into force.

The Canadian delegation to the conference was led by Mr. John Noble, Director General of the International Security and Arms Control Bureau of External Affairs and International Trade Canada. The delegation was pleased to include a representative of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Canada: Mr. Andrew Quinn, Director Materials Management, Merck Frosst Canada Inc. In addition, as a result of regular consultations with the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, the delegation knew that it had that Association's pledge of support for Canada's efforts toward the conclusion of a CW Convention, and for Canada's willingness to do its part in implementing a Convention.

Although measures to ensure the destruction of existing chemical weapons and their production facilities will affect only a small number of countries, each and every state party to a Convention will be required to demonstrate that its chemical industry is not being used — either directly or indirectly — to circumvent the Convention. Verification of non-production of chemical weapons will have to extend far beyond the 10-year destruction phase into the indefinite future. This verification will have to not only embrace chemicals currently of concern because of their toxicity or potential for use as key precursors to toxic chemicals, but also be able to keep abreast of newly-discovered chemicals and technological developments that could be diverted to prohibited purposes. As a result, the chemical industry will be sub-

jected to scrutiny in a way and to a degree that might be considered extremely burdensome.

Or would it be? One of the messages carried to Canberra by the Canadian and some other Western delegations is that their chemical industries are already highly regulated for health and environmental reasons. They are already subject to data reporting obligations and to inspection. What will be new under a CW Convention is the quantity and level of detailed information that will have to be provided to an international agency. Also new will be the requirement to allow not only national, but also international, inspectors access to certain facilities on a routine basis and to any facility in the event of challenge inspection. While being fully supportive of a CW Convention, the chemical industry has had concerns about the protection of proprietary and other confidential business information, and about the potential disruption of its operations during inspections.

In his address to the conference, Mr. Noble noted that while national obligations to demonstrate compliance with the Convention will be paramount, great efforts are being made to take industry's concerns into account. He took the opportunity to present to all delegations a study prepared under the auspices of Canada's Verification Research Unit concerning the kind of preparations that will be required, at the national level, to meet obligations under the Convention. The study, entitled "Role and Function of a National Authority in the Implementation of a Chemical Weapons Convention," could be useful to other countries in making their preparations.

Mr. Noble also pointed to the reality and danger of chemical weapons proliferation. He told conference participants that Canada has taken interim measures to exercise its national responsibility in ensuring that Canadian industry does not contribute, even inadvertently, to any production of chemical weapons.

Mr. Quinn was invited to address a workshop on the subject of voluntary industry initiatives to facilitate a Conven-

tion. He discussed an initiative called "responsible care," which originated with the chemical industry in Canada and has since been embraced by other countries. According to Mr. Quinn, the essence of "responsible care" is information flow. It involves the creation at the community, regional and national levels of mechanisms for consultation that bring together the public, labour, industry and government. The program involves the direct participation of senior chemical company officers, ensuring that commitment flows from the top down. Particularly relevant, he said, was the wealth of experience deriving from shared concerns about health and occupational safety, protection of the environment, and community/labour/management relations.

Mr. Quinn explained the inspection regime under which his company already operates in Canada, and the kind of information it must immediately be able to provide to national and provincial authorities when inspectors appear. His own view was that the same information could also be made available to international inspectors. He concluded that industry must show leadership in the responsible use of precursors and machinery which could be diverted to the manufacture of chemical weapons.

Such views were typical of the sense of responsibility and expression of cooperation on the part of the chemical industry evident at the conference, which took the tangible form of a consensus "Industry Statement." Expressing unequivocal abhorrence of chemical warfare and a willingness to work actively with governments to achieve and then implement a global ban on chemical weapons, the industry participants made quite clear their opposition to the diversion of their products for the manufacture of chemical weapons.

Industry's offer of assistance, as the diplomats in Geneva seek to conclude negotiations on practical questions associated with treaty implementation, was welcomed wholeheartedly by the officials present at Canberra. As Mr. Noble concluded in his statement: "This dialogue is essential if we are going to fashion a convention that will work in practice, not just look good on paper." ■