Statement by Ambassador (Dr.) Pankaj Sharma, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament during 2019 Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention on December 3, 2019

Mr. Chairman,

I extend to you warm felicitations on assuming the Chairmanship of the 2019 Meeting of States Parties to the BWC and assure you of my delegation’s full support and cooperation.

2. India associates itself with the statement delivered by the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of NAM States Parties to the BWC.

3. India attaches high importance to the BWC, which is the first non-discriminatory disarmament treaty banning a complete category of weapons of mass destruction and remains committed to enhancing the effectiveness of the BWC and strengthening its implementation.

4. Universalisation of the Convention continues to be a priority for India. The growing rank of the States Parties to the BWC is a testimony to the relevance of the Convention. We welcome the United Republic of Tanzania as the newest member of the BWC family bringing the number of States Parties to the Convention to 183. India has been supportive of the Sponsorship Programme, which in our view, has made an important contribution to realizing the goal of universalisation.

5. While we express sincere appreciation for the outstanding work being carried out by the ISU notwithstanding its modest resources, it is important that the ISU be strengthened and placed on a firm and sustainable footing.

6. This brings me to my next point that we must ensure the financial health of the Convention by ensuring both stability and predictability in availability of resources. We commend the extensive work undertaken by you this year towards addressing the financial issues confronted by the Convention. While it is a matter of satisfaction that 92.3% of assessed contributions for 2019 has been received, there is still a shortfall of funds owing to the late payment of assessed contributions and outstanding arrears. India has always met all its financial obligations under the Convention on time. We urge all States Parties to ensure that their financial contributions are made in time and all outstanding arrears are paid at the earliest.

7. The 2018 MSP had adopted a set of financial measures, including the establishment of a Working Capital Fund as an interim measure, to be reviewed at the Ninth Review Conference. I am pleased to announce that in line with our commitment to strengthen the implementation of the Convention, India has decided to contribute an amount of US $10,000 to the BWC Working Capital Fund.
Mr. Chairman,

8. We are approaching the Ninth Review Conference to be held in 2021. The Review Conference will “consider the work and outcomes it receives from the Meetings of States Parties and the Meetings of Experts and decide by consensus on any inputs from the intersessional programme and on any further action”. In this context, the intersessional programme provides a crucial opportunity to further strengthen the implementation of the Convention.

9. We are pleased that this year, the Meetings of Experts held comprehensive and useful discussions on a range of issues of importance to the Convention. We commend the Chairs for steering productive discussions. India actively participated in all five Meetings of Experts. We also organized a side event on ‘Emerging Landscapes of Science and Technology: New Frontiers and Challenges in Bio-threat Detection and Mitigation’, which was well received by the States Parties. We believe that the valuable discussions at this year’s Meetings of Experts can contribute substantively to the preparations for and discussions to be held at the Review Conference. We must seize this opportunity, continue the momentum gained from the inter-sessional meetings and identify concrete action points for the Review Conference.

10. The MSP will also be considering the arrangements for the Ninth Review Conference and its Preparatory Committee in 2021. Robust consultations among all States Parties, for ensuring adequate arrangements on substantive and procedural issues, as envisaged through UNGA First Committee Resolution A/C.1/74/L.44 adopted by consensus, is essential for the success of the Ninth Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

12. Institutional strengthening is the key to ensuring full and effective implementation of the Convention. India shares the strong belief among States Parties that the most effective means of strengthening the BWC is the conclusion of a legally-binding Protocol to the Convention. We support the objective of creating a mechanism for verification of compliance that provides the assurance of compliance agreed within the framework of the BWC by States Parties and acts as a deterrent against non-compliance.

13. While CBMs have served as an important transparency measure to enhance trust, they are not a substitute for an effective mechanism for verification and compliance. In 2019, the ISU utilized the new electronic CBM platform for the first time. We hope this will aid in enhancing the utility of CBMs, which has so far been limited due to the irregular submission and sub-optimal quality of the data provided.

14. Recognizing the importance of building a broad-based support for strengthening implementation of Article III, India, along with the United States, had submitted a Working Paper titled ‘Strengthening Implementation of Article III of the BTWC’. The effective implementation of Article III would ensure that cooperation envisaged under Article X is taken forward in mutual confidence.
15. India continues to attach high importance to the full and effective implementation of Article X. Equitable benefits for States Parties, in particular developing countries, resulting from effective implementation of Article X, will also help in realizing universal adherence to the Convention.

16. Rendering assistance to States Parties to the BWC is a legal obligation under Article VII of the Convention. It is clear that the absence of clearly laid out procedures for seeking assistance, and the associated techno-political-legal questions related to Article VII, have led to a deficit in the ability of the global community to respond effectively and provide assistance to States Parties exposed to dangers as a result of violation of the BWC. In this context, India and France have proposed establishment of a database for assistance in the framework of Article VII. We also welcome the discussion in this year’s Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness on this subject.

17. Review of new scientific and technological developments of relevance to the Convention is mandated by Article XII. India had submitted a Working Paper at the 7th Review Conference with specific proposals on conducting S&T review. India’s resolution on “Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament” was adopted by consensus at the 74th Session of the First Committee of the UNGA this year. In our view, measures taken to mitigate biological risks should be conducive to legitimate peaceful activities, including international cooperation. In this context, I am pleased to share that India, along with Germany, Qatar and Switzerland supported UNIDIR in organizing a one day seminar as mandated by the Resolution focusing on issues, some of which are relevant to our work in the BWC.

18. In concluding, India would like to reaffirm its unwavering commitment to the Convention and to the success of the 2019 Meeting of the States Parties.

Thank you.

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