Thank you Mr. Chair,

It is my pleasure to take the floor on behalf of Australia. You and your Vice-Chairs can be assured of the full support of Australia in promoting common understandings and effective actions as we head towards the November Review Conference.

Mr. Chair,

The Biological Weapons Convention has as its primary aim the mission to prevent the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, and retention of biological weapons. In this preparatory meeting, we must focus on creating the conditions for progress to be made at the August Preparatory Conference and at the Review Conference itself.

A key priority for us will be to further advance the effective implementation of the Convention in line with the fundamental goals of Article I. A key element to achieving progress on this goal is to build support on ways we can improve the next intersessional process. We will endeavour to work cross regionally to support practical initiatives that will chart a sensible way forward in the post 2016 Review Conference period.

Australia firmly believes that national implementation remains a key cornerstone of the BWC. The joint working paper produced by Malaysia and Australia on national implementation in both 2014 and 2015, with the support of 13 cross regional delegations in total, offers some useful ideas to promote reassurance on this issue. We believe that transparency in implementation is one way to improve confidence among States Parties. We support initiatives such as Compliance Assessment, Peer Review, and Implementation Review to advance this goal. As we have in the past, we urge all States Parties to take all possible steps to ensure their domestic legislation comprehensively implements the BWC, and to share with other States Parties their best practices and lessons learned. Australia values the participation of NGOs in BWC meetings, and their contribution in furthering the aims of the BWC.

Mr. Chair,

We have witnessed remarkable advances in the life sciences in recent years, which have the potential to contribute significantly to global health and development. Australia would like to encourage specific proposals at this preparatory meeting that would enable scientific experts leading our BWC discussions to review and inform States Parties on the latest scientific developments and their associated risks. The working papers submitted so far provide a useful basis for an informed debate. They offer us solid ground for achieving a consensus outcome that will progress and improve our consideration of the rapid developments in life sciences for the next intersessional period. We remain confident that a consensus decision can be taken at the RevCon on this important issue.
We remain committed to international cooperation and collaboration in line with the implementation of Article X. In this respect, Australia has been a regular contributor to the ISU sponsorship program and is very pleased to have committed AUD 50 000 in 2016 for the Review Conference process.

We have made solid progress on Article VII cooperation in the current ISP. We believe that a number of very worthwhile suggestions have been proposed which offer a way forward, including ideas presented by India, the US, South Africa and France.

We also are encouraged by the discussion which has developed around export controls. This is an excellent way that we can strengthen Article III of the BWC, and commend in particular the ideas contained in the joint India/US paper on this issue at the 2014 MSP.

Mr. Chair,

We wish to stress once again the vital importance of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). We also hope that the RevCon can agree on the electronic CBM submission platform that already exists thanks to the support of the European Union.

Australia would like renew our call for universality and continue to urge States not parties to ratify or accede to the BWC as soon as possible, and to follow-through with full implementation of the Convention.

This Review Conference process offers an opportunity to identify specific areas where work is needed to strengthen this Convention, including improving the intersessional process and determining the most pragmatic and effective means to address each of these issues, whether individually or collectively. We note in particular a number of ideas worth considering in the US paper on this issue presented at the MSP in 2015 and again at this session. Many of the areas that need strengthening can be addressed effectively via voluntary or politically binding mechanisms.

Mr. Chair,

This Preparatory meeting offers an important opportunity for us to lay down clear markers for an ambitious outcome for the Review Conference. It is in the interests of the BWC membership that we build upon the intersessional process (ISP) outcomes, and also think creatively as to how we can structure a better ISP post 2016. Under your leadership, we are confident that we will conclude the BWC RevCon having strengthened the BWC in its primary mission: the prohibition of biological weapons. You can count on our full support.

Thank you.