Mr. Chairman,

My delegation thanks you - and the Implementation Support Unit - for your efforts and offers you its full support for a successful preparatory process and productive outcome to the Eighth Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman, fellow delegates, and colleagues:

This Preparatory Committee meeting launches the eighth review of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. My government is pleased that the States Parties agreed to engage during this PrepCom process in both procedural and substantive preparations for the upcoming Review Conference. This should give us enough time to explore ideas, build consensus, and agree at the RevCon on specific decisions and actions to strengthen the BWC. The United States has submitted working papers on RevCon issues at both the December MSP and this meeting, and we look forward to hearing the views of other delegations.

But first, I extend a warm welcome to Côte d’Ivoire, our 174th State Party. We are pleased that our numbers are steadily growing and appreciate the efforts of other Parties and the ISU toward universal membership.

Mr. Chairman,

We also see good news in 2016 regarding the annual submission of confidence-building measures, on which my government places great importance. Less than two weeks after the April 15 deadline, 61 States Parties have submitted CBMs – a significant improvement compared to this time last year. We thank the ISU for providing this important information to States Parties by rapidly posting CBM returns to the BWC website as they are received. We also believe congratulations to several States Parties are in order: We congratulate Gabon and Oman for their first-ever CBM submissions. We congratulate Montenegro for its first-ever CBM
submission as an independent State. And we congratulate Myanmar both for making its first-ever CBM submission, and for making it publicly available.

Mr. Chairman,

The BWC is an important agreement with noble objectives, and it has contributed to international peace and security. Unfortunately, it is also true that the threat of biological weapons remains real. While technological advances and the diffusion of knowledge are providing positive benefits to many nations addressing a wide range of human health, environmental, and other challenges, these technical advances also place biological weapon capabilities within reach of more State and non-State actors than ever before. That makes it all the more urgent for States Parties to take stronger national and international action to confront this threat by enhancing BWC implementation. There are things we can do now to address the key challenges we face. We do not have to engage in, and wait for the results of, protracted negotiations. The Review Conference has the authority to take decisions on a number of important issues if we can find agreement—and it also has the authority to establish stronger structures to carry forward work after the Conference itself ends.

Mr. Chairman,

We have a mandate to strengthen national implementation, and at the Eighth Review Conference we should further develop our shared understanding of what measures will help to achieve this goal. The United States was pleased to submit jointly with India in 2015 a working paper on “Strengthening Implementation of Article III of the BTWC” (BWC/MSP/2015/WP.1). The working paper focused on further steps that could be taken in this area, specifically on national legislation, national export controls, and cooperative activities. We commend the suggested measures to States Parties for consideration and adoption at the Eighth Review Conference. The sponsors are available to discuss these suggestions, and we seek your support for these proposals to promote and strengthen implementation of Article III at the Eighth Review Conference.

The United States has introduced additional working papers to this meeting. I’d like to mention these briefly and solicit comments from States Parties.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States continues to attach great importance to promoting compliance with the BWC. Establishing and maintaining confidence that States Parties are abiding by their commitments is essential to ensuring the stability and integrity of
the treaty regime. Practical steps can be taken to enhance transparency, build confidence in compliance, reduce doubts or concerns about States Parties’ actions or intentions, and address questions constructively when they arise.

Confidence-building measures and consultative processes under Article V are both tools that were established early in the history of this Convention, and that have sometimes been useful in addressing questions or concerns. The United States has submitted a working paper entitled, “Strengthening Confidence-building and Consultative Mechanisms under the Biological Weapons Convention.” It suggests further steps to strengthen the CBMs and to broaden the range of consultative tools available to States Parties, including developing more detailed options for constructive bilateral consultations; developing separate, lower-key procedures for States Parties’ use to ask clarifying questions with respect to a CBM submission; and establishing an understanding that, where bilateral or multilateral consultations are unsuccessful, a State Party could request the UN Secretary-General to use his or her “good offices” to seek clarification.

While on this subject, Mr. Chairman, I should point out that in recent months, there have been questions raised about U.S. activities in the context of the BWC. The United States stands ready to engage in a constructive dialogue, consistent with the provisions of Article V, and the proposals we are making aim to enhance cooperation and implementation in this area. We take the BWC, and the implementation process, very seriously.

Mr. Chairman,

The ability to investigate allegations of use rapidly and effectively is important to effective implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention, and particularly to activating the assistance obligations set out in Article VII. The principal tool for such investigations resides with the United Nations, but this does not mean we need a new tool, nor does it mean there is no role for the BWC RevCon. We have identified a number of options, which we set out in a working paper entitled “Possibilities for Strengthening the International Community’s Ability to Investigate Alleged Use.”

In brief, those possibilities include:

(1) Supporting the implementation of the International Health Regulations and the aims of Global Health Security Agenda, which build national capabilities that will strengthen our ability to both investigate and respond to a biological weapons attack;
(2) clarifying the relationship between the BWC and the UNSGM, by recognizing that the Mechanism could play an important role in implementing provisions of the Convention related to Articles V, VI, and VII, and could be initiated in several different ways, all of which are fully consistent with the Convention;

(3) supporting efforts to ensure the operational readiness of the UNSGM;

and

(4) by reconfirming the commitment made at the Third RevCon that States Parties will cooperate with international investigations of alleged biological weapon use, and affirming their willingness to provide access to an investigation team, consistent with safety and domestic legal constraints.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the course of the 2012-2015 intersessional period, numerous States Parties have expressed support for routine review of science and technology developments in this forum. The Swiss delegation has usefully presented structural options currently in use in other fora, and some States Parties have submitted working papers at this meeting to express their current views on S&T. The United States has also submitted a working paper, entitled, "S&T Review for the BWC: Features of an Effective Process,” in which we outline four features we consider to be essential for effective S&T review. Experts on my delegation would be pleased to discuss U.S. views and to hear the views of other States Parties at this meeting. We especially encourage discussions about what States Parties need from an S&T review body in order to fulfill Article XII. While the structure of S&T review is important, so too is the substance the review will produce – and the structure should be in service to the substance.

Mr. Chairman,

I’ve outlined a number of ideas for action the Conference could take with immediate effect. But we also know that there will be more work to do – both to implement such decisions, and to continue work on issues not ripe for action at the Eighth RevCon. While there have been some positive results over the past 5 years, more must be done to take practical steps against the threat of biological weapons. The last intersessional process tried to do too much in too little time. It did not provide sufficient opportunities for in-depth discussion of key issues by technical
experts, and it rarely resulted in clear, specific “common understandings” that would make a difference in national implementation of the BWC.

The United States has submitted a working paper entitled “Strengthening the Ability to Take Action: An Essential Agenda for the Eighth Review Conference.” It updates and expands on the paper we presented at the 2015 Meeting of States Parties, taking into account comments and suggestions from many States Parties. The steps we propose are not radical – indeed, they are based in many respects on proposals first advanced by other governments. But we believe they are significant: by allocating more time, restructuring our work to allow more in-depth substantive and technical discussions, clarifying the decision-making authorities of the Meeting of States Parties, and establishing a Steering Group to assist the Chairman in overseeing and managing the work, we believe we can take meaningful steps in four key areas:

(a) Strengthening implementation, including measures to combat acquisition and use of biological weapons by terrorists or other non-State actors, and enhancing transparency and assurance of compliance.

(b) Strengthening international capacities for coordination, investigation, and assistance in the event of a suspicious outbreak or biological weapons attack.

(c) Responding to developments in science and technology, including through oversight, outreach, and education.

(d) Promoting and coordinating international cooperation and capacity-building, including both Article X and implementation support.

In December, we presented a working paper that talked about a “realistic agenda.” So why do we speak now of an “Essential Agenda”? The answer, Mr. Chairman, is pretty straightforward: the last MSP convinced us that action along these lines is not only feasible, but absolutely essential. The last intersessional process simply did not work, and repeating it should not be considered a reasonable option by any delegation.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States believes the upcoming Review Conference is an important opportunity for States Parties to take action to address the key challenges we
confront, and to take steps to strengthen our ability to take action between Review Conferences. Over the coming months we will further develop our ideas on a range of important issues, which we will share at the August PrepCom. We are also studying the proposals of other delegations closely, with a view to developing common elements that can be shared by all. We look forward to a collegial and productive process and welcome this PrepCom to help lay the groundwork for a successful Review Conference.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.