Mr. Chairman,

The Indian delegation congratulates you on your assuming the chairmanship of the 2018 Meeting of States Parties to the BWC.

2. India associates itself with the statement made by Venezuela on behalf of the 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. We remain committed to enhancing the effectiveness of the BWC and strengthening its implementation.

4. India continues to attach importance to the universalization of the BWC. We have made significant strides towards this goal in the recent past, with Niue, the State of Palestine and the Central African Republic acceding to the Convention this year, taking the total number of States Parties to 182. We welcome the delegations of our newest States Parties among our midst. The Sponsorship Programme, in our view, has made an important contribution in this regard, and India has been supportive of the programme including through financial contributions.

5. We are pleased that the Meeting of States Parties in 2017, under the chairmanship of India, could successfully deliver on its mandate, owing largely to the constructive engagement of all States Parties, which led to adoption, by consensus, of an intersessional programme for 2018-20. We have had robust discussions on a range of issues during the Meetings of Experts this year which has made a significant contribution towards strengthening the Convention. India participated actively in all Meetings of Experts. In this context, we express our appreciation for the efforts put in by the Chairs of the five Meetings of Experts resulting in substantive discussions on a range of issues of importance to the Convention and welcome their respective Reports. We look forward to further constructive engagements by experts over the next two years till the 9th Review Conference in 2021.

6. Mr. Chairman, the long-term sustainability of the Convention, in our view, should essentially be rooted in legally-binding measures with all States Parties reposing collective confidence in the Convention.
7. India shares the widespread interest amongst States Parties to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the BWC through negotiation and conclusion of a Protocol, covering all provisions of the Convention. Verification of compliance, is critically important for States Parties to be collectively reassured that the provisions of the Convention are being realized. In this context, India supports the objective of a mechanism for verification of compliance that provides the assurance of compliance agreed within the framework of BWC by States Parties and acts as a deterrent against non-compliance.

8. While CBMs are an important transparency measure to enhance trust, they are not an alternative to an effective mechanism for verification of compliance. CBMs are not declarations and cannot be treated as such for assessing non-compliance. We are willing to look at proposals to update CBM formats related to the object and purposes of the Convention and in a manner that does not impose an undue burden on States Parties. India on its part has been making timely submission of its CBMs.

9. Recognizing the importance of building broad-based support for strengthening implementation of Article III, India, along with the United States, has submitted a Working Paper at this MSP entitled ‘Strengthening Implementation of Article III of the BTWC’. In our view, a forward-looking cooperative approach, as outlined in this Working Paper, is conducive to finding common ground than those that only deepen old divisions.

10. Assistance under Article VII is a legal obligation under the Convention. It is clear that the lack of a comprehensive Protocol to strengthen implementation of all aspects of the BWC has created a gap in international community’s capacity to respond effectively and provide assistance to States Parties exposed to dangers as a result of violation of the BWC. Through our Working Paper first tabled at the Preparatory Committee for the 8th Review Conference and again at this MSP, India and France have proposed the establishment of a database for assistance within the framework of Article VII. The 8th Review Conference supported the establishment of the database, recognizing it as a way to help in implementation of Article VII. We also welcome the discussion in this year’s Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response and Preparedness on this subject and the subsequent reflection in the Chair’s summary. We continue to see this as an operational and concrete tool providing an incentive for the Convention’s universalization.

11. The full and effective implementation of Article X of the Convention is important to generate equitable benefits for States Parties, in particular developing countries. In pursuance of the decision of the 7th Review Conference, India submitted a Working Paper in 2014 containing its National Report on Article X Implementation. We also submitted an updated National Report as a Working Paper for the 8th Review Conference. India continues to attach a high importance to the full and effective
implementation of Article X and we believe that strengthened implementation of Article III would ensure that cooperation envisaged under Article X is taken forward in mutual confidence.

12. 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 73rd Session of the First Committee of the UNGA this year. This resolution took cognizance of the discussions held under the BWC’s Meeting of Experts on Science and Technology this year. There is a need for reaching a common understanding on a framework and criteria for assessing risks and relevance of the new and emerging technologies to the Convention. In our view, measures taken to mitigate biological risks should be proportional to the assessed risk and not hamper legitimate peaceful activities, including international cooperation. Further, there should be no hindrance to peaceful activities such as vaccine and diagnostic developments, which are important for developing countries for meeting their public health needs. As a major vaccine producer, India supports international efforts for ensuring timely and affordable access to vaccines, including during public-health emergencies.

13. Effective national export controls are important tools to prevent the misuse of biological agents and toxins for purposes prohibited by the Convention or falling into the hands of terrorists, which is a major concern for the international community. India is committed to maintaining effective national export controls in line with the highest international standards. With a view to address global concerns on the proliferation of WMD to terrorists, India has been submitting a resolution on 'Measures to Prevent Terrorists from Acquiring WMD' at the First Committee, which has been adopted by consensus since 2002. Further, with the objective of promoting effective implementation of UNSCR 1540, India, in cooperation with Germany and the UNODA, hosted the India-Wiesbaden Conference in April this year.

14. While the ISU has been doing outstanding work in meeting its onerous responsibilities, such as assisting efforts of States Parties to implement the decisions taken at Review Conferences and encouraging universalization, to name a few, further reinforcing the currently rather thinly staffed ISU, States Parties should consider to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. We would, of course, have to keep in mind considerations regarding financial resources. And that brings me to my next point, Mr. Chairman, that we must ensure the financial health of the Convention by ensuring both stability and predictability in availability of resources. The Indian delegation would urge all States Parties to ensure that their financial contributions are made in time and all outstanding arrears are paid, which would help in addressing the severe challenges the Convention is currently faced with regard
to its financial condition. We welcome the efforts being made by you, Mr Chairman, in this regard and hope that a sustainable solution can be arrived at collectively.

15. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to announce that we have instituted an Annual Disarmament and International Security Fellowship Programme for young diplomats commencing from January, 2019. The Programme aims to cover the BWC in a comprehensive manner and we hope that it shall make a valuable contribution to our common purpose of ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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