Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives:

The University of London* is pleased to contribute its view to this Meeting of States Parties. We see the Convention as a treaty in need of reinforcement on all sides. There is no single remedy but there are practical steps that can be taken to make it more effective. We encourage States Parties to give these serious consideration.

Science and technology do not stand still. Some States Parties are better placed than others to make their own assessments of S&T developments as they have a bearing on the BWC, whether for good or ill, but there is still no regular body for S&T review in the service of the Convention as a whole. The relevant Meeting of Experts has made a start by examining particular topics for two days, once a year; but to put S&T review on a firmer basis a permanent institution is needed, with expert members, a scientific secretary and budget. Proposals for an advisory board or panel should be finalised in time for clear recommendations to go forward to the Ninth Review Conference. This requires a renewed search for agreement in the 2020 Meeting of Experts, which can then be refined and given definitive shape through the 2020 Meeting of States Parties. We would judge this a particularly valuable outcome of the current Intersessional Process.

We continue to urge States Parties to make fuller use of the extensive provision for consultation and cooperation which is available within the framework of Article V. That broad availability of Article V needs to be put to good use, so that suspicions and ambiguities verging on accusation are more likely to be resolved in a cooperative spirit and less likely to fester unresolved. Article V is sufficiently flexible to allow States Parties to choose between multilateral and bilateral, formal and informal, public and private, in selecting the mode of consultation which best suits them when a compliance concern or any other problem related to the Convention arises. But its potential needs to be explored more intensively, and imaginatively, by the whole BWC community. This is a task requiring particular attention in the two years remaining before the Ninth Review Conference.

We commend those States Parties which have worked together on voluntary initiatives to encourage greater openness in support of the Convention, over and above their participation in its politically binding Confidence-Building Measures. Although compliance assessment, peer review, implementation review and transparency visits are distinct from one another, they all share an overarching objective: to advance the compliance debate in a workable, pragmatic way. These initiatives emphasise interaction and flexibility, expert level exchanges of best practices, and a broad conception of relevant laboratories and facilities. They all serve to enhance transparency and build trust. We hope that more States Parties will engage in voluntary initiatives of this kind, and that the body of experience already built up since 2011 will be channelled into substantive preparations for the Ninth Review Conference.
Article VII is an expression of solidarity: in committing themselves in advance to helping a victim State Party with humanitarian assistance, all States Parties are sending potential violators of the Convention a message that their efforts at violation will be less effective than intended. But the message only carries conviction if everyone is confident that Article VII would operate successfully in practice. Accordingly, more work on assistance planning and inter-agency coordination needs to be done in preparation for the eventuality that Article VII is ever applied. There is a close link here with capacity-building: both national and international capacities for managing outbreaks of disease need strengthening, whether the outbreak is natural in occurrence or deliberate. And there is the further complication that the origin - natural or not - of any disease outbreak may not be immediately clear. Within this context, the procedures for operationalising Article VII continue to need definition.

Institutional strengthening has long been a divisive issue. This is particularly disappointing to all who want to build confidence in the Convention and see it as under-equipped to operate successfully in an ever-changing environment. Its institutional deficits are evident, but agreement on acceptable remedies continues to be elusive. We encourage renewed efforts to overcome deadlock in MX.5 and to produce a constructive outcome for MSP 2020 to refine into proposals for the Ninth Review Conference. Anything MSP 2019 can do to clear the way for progress in 2020 will be welcome. In the meantime, we urge all States Parties to pay their contributions to the BWC budget in full and on time, and especially those which owe money to clear their accumulated arrears, which cause insecurity and damage to the Convention. We support the work of the Implementation Support Unit and want to see it more adequately resourced to match the responsibilities that States Parties have entrusted to its all too small staff.

We wish you a successful outcome to this Meeting of States Parties and trust that the Convention will benefit from your efforts, in which you may be assured of our continuing support.

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* The University of London dates from 1836, and is a major component of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and beyond. It has evolved into a confederation of academically and financially autonomous colleges, which continue to share some central University of London institutions and a long history of joint endeavours in education and research. University College London (founded 1826) and King’s College London (founded 1829) were the original colleges of the University of London, while the London School of Economics & Political Science (founded 1895) joined in 1900.