Mr. Chair,

Let me congratulate you for the assumption of your function and assure you in my delegation's full support for your active endeavors in the coming days to bring our MSP to a successful outcome.

The Republic of Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the EU. Allow me, however, to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

What we witness today is a pace of scientific and technological developments leaving no chance for second best approaches or reversibility options for possible mistakes when it comes to security, safety and health of our societies.

The technological advances provide for the capability to deploy disease agents or ‘made-to-order’ gene sequences allowing to modify existing microorganisms or even create organisms without any stocks of living microorganism, or a large, state-run biological weapon programme. Production of microorganisms using computer-based ‘genetic blueprints’ has become increasingly feasible and dangerously easy in accessing.

Among the most pressing questions are how to constrain the misuse potential of science and to manage advances in genetics, how to counter the bioterrorism threat and how to detect and respond effectively to an attack should one occur. Part of these questions is also, how to manage and exercise surveillance of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.

Many innovations may cause incapacitation rather than death and could therefore slip into military or civil defense use without states even making the connection to biological warfare risks.

In, addition, the automated laboratories, bring many benefits, but also proliferation risks stemming from both State and non-State actors. Tackling the latter is a very complex task, especially for national export control systems. This task requires a high level of vigilance and alert.

The threats and the ease of access to very advanced production processes and related means for the dissemination of diseases or dangerous pathogens require a whole scale of joint efforts to counter all related threats by acting in a concerted manner.

Whatever the challenges are, we need to be at the level of the required responses. Our Convention must be in a position to respond to emerging issues and challenges in a timely and robust fashion.

The lack of common understanding on the right way for our confidence building and verification measures should not discourage us. Instead, we should continue intensively discussing in order to focus on what is feasible and provide for first commonly agreed steps. These steps, surely, will not satisfy the claims of all states parties, but would provide for joint actions and shared approach and most importantly, gaining experience.

We are ready to support discussions on the benefits of confidence building and transparency measures such as peer-reviews, voluntary visits and other initiatives, facilitating cooperation on science and technology for the benefit of all.
We would support also BTWC measures towards awareness raising among relevant professionals in the private and public sector and training and education programs for those granted access to biological agents and toxins relevant to the BTWC. We need committed action to promote a culture of responsibility amongst relevant professionals and awareness about the potential misuse of biological agents and research results.

Going the path of hostile rhetoric and exchange of accusations would show inability to match the level of responsibility required to master the security, safety and health challenges stemming from contemporary developments in biotechnologies. It would also show that we are not able, at least for the near future, to make use of all the practical advantages the progress in bio-genetics and bioengineering offers for tackling problems related to agriculture and healthcare (for instance), the latter providing for healthy societies and sustainable economies leading to more peace and security for all.

If we are to practice what we preach, we should act not in haste, but also not in waste.

We need also not forget that, the moment the first deliberate misuse or an attack occur, we will all know that all we did is just losing precious time.

Let us all proof that we are capable of the opposite.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.

03 December 2019

Geneva