STATEMENT DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE MEETING OF STATES
PARTIES OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (BWC)

03-06 DECEMBER 2019

Chairperson,

1. On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to extend our congratulations to Ambassador Yann Hwang of France on his election as Chair of the 2019 Meeting of States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). I assure you of my delegation’s full co-operation and support in ensuring a successful conclusion to our deliberations.

2. South Africa also associates itself with the statement delivered by the Non-Aligned Movement.

Chairperson,

3. South Africa would like to reiterate its commitment to the full, effective and balanced implementation of the BWC. The Convention makes an important contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security by preventing the threat posed by biological weapons, and in this regard South Africa would support any initiatives and proposals that aim to strengthen the Convention to ensure that our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons is achieved. As with other WMD, no cause could ever justify the use of such weapons by any actor under any circumstances given the devastating humanitarian consequences.

4. My delegation supports the universalisation of the Convention and notes its importance, and in this regard welcomes that the United Republic of Tanzania has deposited its instrument of ratification becoming the 183rd State Party to the Convention. South Africa urges the
remaining 14 States which have not yet joined the BWC to accede to the Convention without delay.

5. The primary goal of My Delegation is to continue to reinforce the responsible production, possession and trade of goods and advanced technologies in the biological field. South Africa, in so doing, is committed to promoting the benefits which disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control hold for international peace and security, particularly to countries in Africa and the developing world.

Chairperson,

6. South Africa attaches great importance to the Intersessional Process and believes there is value in continuously taking steps to improve and strengthen the process. In this regard, My delegation welcomes the discussions that took place at the Meetings of Experts in August 2019 and looks forward to the successful conclusion of the Meeting of States Parties. South Africa is honoured to have chaired the MX3 on the Strengthening National Implementation and hopes that the discussions would be considered and possible outcomes identified. National Implementation is a broad Article that requires a number of measures to be implemented. There is therefore a need to elaborate further on the measures that constitute national implementation so there can be common understanding amongst all State Parties. South Africa believes that the vigorous and fruitful discussions that took place during the Meeting of Experts are what should come out of the intersessional process and hopes that the next meetings will build on those discussions and make recommendations to the Review Conference for adoption. My delegation would like to thank all States Parties for their active participation in the meeting.

7. Regarding Article VII, South Africa appreciates all the States Parties that have highlighted their support on the two working papers that South Africa previously submitted under this Article. South Africa believes that operationalisation of Article VII is important, hence the submission of the two working papers which highlighted inter alia: guidelines to assist a State Party submitting a request for assistance to the United Nations Security Council; options that a State Party has for requesting assistance and guidelines and questions to be considered for provision of assistance independent of UNSC approval. The working papers were continuously refined to take into consideration the comments by States Parties, in an effort to move forward the operationalisation of this Article. It is regrettable that discussions on this
Article have stagnated which does not bring us any closer to strengthening and operationalising Article VII. South Africa is nonetheless willing to engage further with States Parties on the two proposals previously made as we move towards the final phase of the Intersessional Programme.

Chairperson,

8. On the issue of Article X of the Convention, South Africa believes that as we continue our endeavours to strengthen the BWC regime, it is vital that we should also focus on the developmental and co-operation features of the Convention. South Africa, as an African country and member of the Non-Aligned Movement, shares the view that Article X should promote the right of States Parties to participate in the exchange of equipment, materials and scientific information for peaceful purposes, and that States Parties in a position to do so, should contribute to the further development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in this field. South Africa also strongly believes, in line with Article X of the Convention, that its implementation should not hamper economic and technological development of the peaceful uses of biological agents, but allow the beneficial elements of these agents to be developed to aid humanity.

9. My delegation believes in the importance of international cooperation and assistance in the combating and management of disease outbreaks. South Africa therefore believes that greater international cooperation and assistance is required to alleviate the burden of the threat posed by biological weapons. Initiatives such as the exchange in biological sciences and technology, the promotion of capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis, as well as the containment of infectious diseases, among many others, could continue to be further explored.

10. South Africa shares the view that a legally binding instrument, including appropriate verification measures would strengthen the Convention and improve its implementation. The negotiation of such an instrument should therefore remain a priority. We regret that consensus on this important matter remains elusive. However, in the absence of such negotiations, South Africa supports other means of strengthening the implementation of the
Convention and believes that mechanisms that aim to strengthen the Convention should not be ignored.

Chairperson

11. South Africa has always highlighted the importance of improved planning in the BWC including on budgetary issues, and in this regard South Africa welcomes the establishment of the Working Capital Fund during the 2018 MSP, which would assist in ensuring that there is cash flow during the year.

12. Lastly, my delegation welcomes the initiation of discussions on preparations for the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. South Africa stands ready to work constructively towards an outcome that would strengthen the Convention and leading towards a successful Review Conference in 2021.

13. In conclusion, Chairperson, South Africa would like to encourage all States Parties to the Convention to work together in achieving the goals of the Convention to eradicate the threat of biological weapons and diseases.

I thank you.