Mr Chair,

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you on your election to the chairmanship of the 8th BWC Review Conference preparatory committee and for the skilful manner with which you are steering our work. You can count on the full support of this delegation in the fulfilment of your task.

Mr Chair,

The BWC is a key pillar of the international security and disarmament architecture, and it will be important that the 8th Review Conference takes the necessary decisions to ensure that the convention remain fully relevant in an environment in rapid mutation. In this context, we welcome the opportunity represented by this strengthened preparatory process to start reflecting on the challenges faced by the BWC early on, and work towards developing measures to address them.

The task ahead of us is significant and we welcome that a number of elements and proposals have already been submitted to our consideration in the form of working papers. If many issues will have to be addressed in the context of the Review Conference, that of the BWC intersessional process will certainly have to be an important focus of our debate. The intersessional process has been established to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the convention, and it will be important to reflect on whether the current approach enables the BWC to meet the challenges that it faces or whether it should evolve so that its impact is reinforced.

If different issues will have to be addressed when assessing the ISP, I would like at this stage focus specifically on one dimension that we believe deserves particular consideration.

In view of the particularly rapid developments in the field of biotechnology, Switzerland is of the view that we should reassess the way in which science and technology developments are reviewed under the Convention. We believe that a dedicated, technical process mandated to reviewing advances in science and technology would provide a more robust and comprehensive technical foundation on which to base our policy conclusions and to ensure the continued effective implementation and relevance of the treaty. S&T developments is at the core of the challenges faced by the convention, and such a dedicated process would contribute to substantiate discussions relating to the implementation of key articles or aspects of the convention [, including article VII, article X, national implementations, dual use research of concern, ....]

All in all, a more systematic and sustainable approach is needed in this area than the current intersessional set-up is designed to provide if the convention is to keep pace with technological developments in the biological field. This is why we suggest reorganising the science and technology review process, whatever form any future intersessional programme takes.

In order to foster this debate and contributed to our collective preparations for the Eighth Review Conference, Switzerland has identified parameters and considerations – each with a set of options – which we believe would shape any dedicated arrangement for reviewing science and technology developments relevant to the BWC. These parameters and considerations are included in the working paper that we have submitted to this meeting of the preparatory committee. The paper is intended to serve as a basis for our deliberations on what features a dedicated science and technology review process should possess if it is to
contribute to achieving the objectives of the Convention, and on how we could develop a process with these features.

We note and welcome the interest that the issue of reassessing how we address the question of science and technology seems to attract, as demonstrated by the various working paper submitted to this meeting. It will be important to gradually develop convergence on this issue as we move forward. Switzerland intends to consult States Parties with a view to exchange opinions and identify common ground in the run-up to the next preparatory meeting and the Review Conference.

To this end, as detailed in our working paper, we invite all States Parties to provide written feedback on the parameters and considerations contained therein by 30 June 2016. Based on the inputs received from States Parties, Switzerland intends to submit an updated version of this working paper and possibly additional resources for the second Preparatory Committee in August.

A shared view on these parameters and considerations will enable us to identify what models and approaches what an effective and sustainable S&T process would look like. We are certainly looking forward to exchanging views with all interested States Parties on relevant parameters and proposed models with a view to enable the Review Conference to agree on a suitable arrangement for a timely, sustained and systematic review of science and technology developments.

Mr Chair,

If the question of the future BWC ISP and the manner in which we address science and technology should be an important focus of our discussion, it will be equally important that the Review Conference makes progress in a number of other areas.

Capitalizing on our important work carried out over the past two years with regard to article VII is one such domain. We have a number of very valuable proposals in this area resulting from this work that should enable us make practical progress and operationalize this key article under the convention.

The work conducted on national implementation over the intersessional cycle provides also ample material to consider, including on the way we could better address the issue of compliance under the convention or of providing reassurance about implementation. The same could certainly be said with regard to the question of confidence-building measures (CBMs). Transparency is a key aspect of treaty implementation and the challenges with regard to CBMs are manifold, whether we look at the number of returns or the substance of the reports.

Mr Chair,

This list of areas where we hope progress will be possible is certainly not exhaustive. We are looking forward to hearing considerations about priorities for the Review Conference from all States parties and to a fruitful collaboration in order to advance them.

The task ahead of us in order to make the 8th Review Conference a success and to ensure that we take the convention forward is significant. In this context, it will be important to make the best possible use of the period between the first and second meeting of the preparatory committee in order to develop gradual convergence with regard to the different ideas on the table. We are certainly looking forward to contributing to this effort.

Mr Chair,
I thank you.