I am standing before you representing the United Nations Resident Coordinator of the UN Multi-Country Office in Fiji. Ms. Osnat Lubrani cannot be here with us unfortunately as she has been traveling on assignment in the region, but sends her best wishes and regards.

I would like to thank the organisers, the Office of Disarmament Affairs and the International Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention, as well as the host, the Government of Fiji, for inviting us here today to participate in this very important workshop.

Clearly, the Biological Weapons Convention represents one of the fundamental pillars in multilateral disarmament. As I have only recently learned, and as the Honourable Minister has pointed out just now, it was the first treaty to outlaw an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Since its entry into force in 1975, a total of 178 States have joined the Convention. The Convention is therefore a widely accepted norm against biological weapons. However, in order to make this norm universal and to make clear that all States reject the very notion of biological warfare, it is important that all States are party to the Convention.

For us at the United Nations in the Pacific, we wanted to find out how we can support this process from our end in the region, together with our regional partners working on security issues, such as the Pacific Island Forum and others. That is why we have been very interested in participating in today’s and tomorrow’s discussions.

We believe that the Biological Weapons Convention regime plays a fundamental role in collective security and serves as an internationally recognized forum for cooperation against the threats posed by biological weapons. In a globalized world, no-one is immune from such threats. Moreover, the Biological Weapons Convention also supports the development of the
peaceful uses of biological science and technology and contributes to strengthening national public health, veterinary, agricultural and emergency-response capacities. These are areas where UNDP, WHO and others could potentially play a promotional role.

It is no coincidence that recent high-level forums and reports have identified biological weapons as one technology that will transform warfare and impact both our individual and collective security.

We understand that assistance is available to help States not party to the Biological Weapons Convention through the process of ratification or accession, and later, with the implementation of the treaty.

States Parties can play a crucial role in advocating universalisation of the Biological Weapons Convention by encouraging neighbours and countries with which they have regular interaction to ratify or accede to the BWC.

Social entrepreneurs and key stakeholders in non-States Parties (e.g. parliamentarians, scientists and academia, industry, civil society, press, etc.) should be encouraged to become strong advocates for urging national governments to join the Biological Weapons Convention at the earliest possible opportunity. Universalisation activities have important education and outreach components.

The Pacific Islands are committed to international peace and security, and we have witnessed their participation in many global and regional forums. We’ve learned that the Biological Weapons Convention is lagging even though disease, whether natural or deliberate, is a major challenge to nations across the globe.

We look forward to the workshop highlighting and elaborating further on these important themes.

Many thanks again.

Vinaka vaka levu.