It is a great honor to be here with you this morning. I would like to start my remarks by thanking the Governments of Fiji and Australia, and the Implementation Support Unit of the Biological Weapons Convention for hosting this workshop to promote the universalization of the Biological Weapons Convention.

My Government assigns great importance to achieving universal adherence to the BWC, as it is part of the foundation of the global regime to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The recent accession of Samoa and Niue brings the Pacific Region closer to achieving full universalization of the Biological Weapons Convention, an accomplishment that would send a very powerful message of solidarity to the international community.

Being part of this international effort to prevent the misuse of biology should be recognized as a fundamental responsibility of all nations. With the rapid advances in and greater knowledge of biological science and technology, there is a growing risk that biological weapons could be obtained and used by non-state actors, including terrorist groups. Therefore, wider membership of the BWC will ensure there are fewer places where bioterrorists can work with impunity.

Biological weapons are primarily thought of as intended for use against humans, but they can also be used against animals and crops. The economic and environmental effects can be devastating.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the Convention is not just about preventing weapons: it is also about building capacity to strengthen
national health systems and to prepare for and respond to outbreaks of infectious disease, whether caused naturally or intentionally. It is understood that a strong national health system is a fundamental defence against a biological attack. Recent outbreaks have shown that diseases can spread rapidly. All states are therefore potentially at risk, and all can benefit from joining the BWC.

An important aspect of the BWC is international assistance and cooperation. The United States and many other States Parties of the Convention support programs that promote science education, train young scientists, facilitate international researcher-to-researcher collaborations, and build public health capacities in general.

For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) works through cooperative agreements with partner countries and international organizations to strengthen public health emergency preparedness and response capacities abroad, including through training personnel in Ministries of Health. HHS works with over seventy countries to develop and train their workforces of field epidemiologists, who detect, respond and contain emerging health threats. More than 10,000 professionals from all over the world have graduated from this program.

For more information about current assistance and cooperation programs, I invite you to visit the BWC webpage, which can be found on the website of the UN Office at Geneva. It contains a database that currently lists a total of 61 offers of assistance, from 11 States Parties and one group of States Parties.

Beyond adhering to the BWC is effective national implementation, which is necessary to ensure that the Convention is effective. Implementation requires laws, regulations, policies and other measures. Smaller countries
with very limited capacity often rely wholly or in large part on existing laws that criminalize intentional efforts to kill or inflict harm in general, rather than developing special legislation on biological weapons, and this approach might well be appropriate in your case. If your government did decide that additional legislation was desirable, there are several “model law” documents available, but this need not be a complex or time-consuming effort.

*If asked about the adherence process:*

- Once your government has completed the domestic procedures necessary to adhere to the legal commitments of the BWC, your government can deposit its instrument of accession or ratification with one or more of the Convention’s three Depositary Governments: the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

- If you choose to deposit your instrument of accession or ratification with the United States, it can be provided to the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Embassy in your capital city.