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**STATEMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM AT THE 40TH
ANNIVERSARY EVENT FOR THE BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN
WEAPONS CONVENTION, GENEVA 30 MARCH 2015**

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First of all I should like to thank the Implementation Support Unit – Daniel and our fellow Depositaries the Russian Federation and the United States for making the arrangements for today’s event to mark the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention; and it is fitting too that we are meeting in the Council Chamber where the CD’s predecessor bodies, first the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee and then the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament convened during the original negotiations that led to the adoption of the text of the Convention. Although we were unable to meet on the exact anniversary, we are close enough to that day in 1975 when that first significant step on the road to chemical and biological weapons disarmament was taken by the international community. The United Kingdom has always had a keen interest in this Convention – we were its founders and for 40 years we have been at the forefront of efforts to ensure its effectiveness and continued relevance in an ever changing world.

On a personal level I might observe that I have been a part of these efforts working in the FCO for 30 years now.

The 1960s were watershed years in the history of multilateral arms control and disarmament. Until that point in time grandiose plans and proposals for general and complete disarmament had come to naught, foundering on the rocks of Cold War suspicion and distrust. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, East and West realised that urgent measures were required to constrain and roll back the nuclear arms race and to enhance international security and stability.

A Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was the first result of this sea change in the summer of 1963, although efforts had been underway since 1958 on securing a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The next priority was to seek what was originally known as a non-dissemination treaty, and between 1965 and 1968 negotiations led to the opening for signature of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on 1 July of 1968. It was against this background that we find the specific origins of the Biological Weapons Convention; British officials in the Foreign Office were tasked to identify the next concrete arms control measure that could be pursued by the United Kingdom following conclusion of an NPT. An internal review came up with three options, one of which was to do something on CBW; the other two concerned the CTBT and Peaceful Nuclear Explosions. The UK then went on to present a Working Paper here in Geneva in August 1968 setting out the arguments for a new initiative that should deal exclusively with the problem of BW; chemical weapons were deemed too difficult to

tackle for a range of reasons at that time and should be left for later attention. In the following year a draft Convention prohibiting the production, development and use of BW was tabled in July by the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Fred Mulley.

However, in 1969 the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies and states from the Non-Aligned Movement were not yet ready to abandon the idea of a single agreement dealing with both CW and BW. There were concerns too that dealing with BW separately and the express prohibition on use would undermine the 1925 Geneva Protocol. It was not until March 1971 that the USSR came to the view that a separate BW ban was worth supporting, so over the period March to September the final decisive round of negotiations took place. In this process three critical elements were lost from the original UK draft – express prohibitions on offensive research and BW use; and a procedure for investigations into alleged use. The consequences of these decisions were to reverberate down the years of the Convention in force. States Parties sought at the first Review Conference in 1980 to strengthen the Convention's basic compliance procedures and have continued to do so ever since.

Since 1975 the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has had in many respects a troubled existence as it has tried to grapple with its compliance aspects – we have been through seven Review

Conferences, meetings of verification experts, a Special Conference, an Ad Hoc Group and three intersessional work programmes. There have been significant compliance problems too over the years with offensive programmes coming to light. Finding consensus on the best way of making the Convention more effective has proved and continues to prove elusive. We are approaching the Eighth Review Conference and many of the issues that have been at the heart of the challenge facing BW disarmament since 1975 remain the same for today's generation of diplomats and experts:

- Coping with scientific and technological change and the associated dual-use problem;
- How to strengthen the Convention's compliance mechanisms where the verification conundrum remains as unforgiving as ever;
- Achieving the proper balance between security and cooperation;
- Ensuring national implementation;
- Achieving universality and,
- The comparative low priority that BW disarmament attracts in policy making.

Despite these challenges the Convention remains fundamental to international efforts to combat the misuse of the life sciences for hostile purposes – public health in reverse as it was once famously put. It is in everyone's interest that the Convention remains effective

and that its prohibitions continue to be upheld and that its proper place in combating infectious disease is recognised. Possession of biological weapons is illegal under international law and the BTWC is the keystone in the global architecture erected to counter the threat of BW; any use of BW would not only be illegal too, but repugnant to the conscience of mankind and no effort should be spared to minimise this risk as the words of the Convention's preamble has it. We must all keep this very pertinent objective to the fore in our future national and collective efforts to sustain the Convention in the coming years as we enter another decade of its existence. Our aim must now be to ensure that the Convention remains relevant and even more effective in its 50th year.

Thank You.