Opening Remarks for Ms Anja KASPERSEN
Director, UNODA/Geneva Branch
Panel Discussion on the implementation of EU Council Decision 2016/51 in support of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)
Room XVIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva
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Distinguished delegates,

European Union partners and colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for making time in your busy schedules to join us this afternoon at this panel discussion on the sidelines of the 2018 BWC Meeting of States Parties. The focus of this event will be to explore the implementation of the universalization, capacity development, and science and technology components of European Union Council Decision 2016/51 in support of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations for convening this event. Moreover, I want to convey our deep gratitude to the European Union for their continued and invaluable support to the work of our office, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, and to the implementation of the BWC. The Council Decision that supported the activities that you will hear about today is the fourth continuous EU initiative in support of the BWC over the last ten years. During that time, the EU has contributed more than 6.3 million euros to the BWC through two EU Joint Actions and two Council Decisions. This support has been instrumental for us to conduct our mandated work in the service of BWC States Parties, and we are immensely thankful for to the EU for its continued support.

Indeed, since its launch in 2016, the current EU Council Decision has been one of the most important tools available to UNODA to promote and
strengthen the implementation of the BWC. Specifically, this EU Council Decision has led to concrete progress on the universalization of the Convention, to instrumental discussions on science and technology in five different regions, and to the rollout of capacity development programmes for nine BWC States Parties. Since you will hear from our next speakers about some of these activities right after me, I will only mention a couple of highlights in these important areas of work of the EU Council Decision.

Over the course of 2017-2018, the EU Council Decision supported a number of universalization activities that led to very important outcomes. This was the case with the Regional Universalization Workshop for the Pacific held in Fiji in July 2017, which prompted the ratification of the BWC by some of its newest States Parties – Samoa in 2017 and Niue in 2018. Samoa became an important BWC advocate in the region and made important headway with Niue to achieve its accession to the Convention. Currently, activities are underway to encourage accession to the Convention by the three remaining States-not-Party in the Pacific: Kiribati, Micronesia and Tuvalu. Next week in Fiji, a follow-up regional workshop will take place, which Australia generously agreed to fund to help the BWC community build on the momentum and the successful outcomes of the EU-funded workshop in 2017.

Regarding the science and technology project of the Council Decision, you will hear from Dr Makalinao about the fifth and final workshop in a series of regional science and technology workshops under the Council Decision: the Regional Workshop for Asia. This event marked the conclusion of an interesting project that brought together life scientists, academics, and industry representatives to discuss their role in the implementation of the BWC and the ever-increasing need to enhance their involvement in BWC-related discussions.

Important thematic convergences were identified in the five regions where workshops were held: Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. These discussions addressed directly the need raised in the UN
Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament to explore in more detail the science and technology dimensions of disarmament, as well as its profound implications for peace and security. Therefore, I would like to briefly elaborate on some of the areas of common interest explored by all regions during these BWC science and technology workshops.

Most points of convergence centered around rapid advances in the life sciences and the risks and benefits that these advances are perceived to pose under the BWC, particularly developments in gene-editing, CRISPR and other related biotechnologies that may make the production of and access to bioweapons more accessible.

There was also consensus across the regions about the biosafety changes that many BWC States Parties are currently witnessing, including in the face of disease outbreaks and the threat of non-state actors in some regions, as well as their potential impact at the regional and global levels.

It was also pointed out that biosafety/biosecurity awareness and preparedness vary widely within regions and that states with low biosecurity preparedness represent a global vulnerability.

The best prevention for any potential bio-attack or natural disease outbreak is preparedness, which cannot be achieved in states that do not possess a basic awareness about biosafety and biosecurity and those which are not part of the international BWC regime.

Emphasis was strongly placed on the need to develop a culture for the ethical use of science and technology among scientists at the global level, a “code of conduct”. This would prevent that the advances achieved in the last decades be used for malign or detrimental purposes in the context of the BWC. Conversely, there was consensus about the positive potential that scientific advances could have on important areas of national development such as health, agriculture, environmental sustainability, and many others linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants in the science and technology workshops cautioned that this requires a careful balance
between the need to regulate bioscience and biotechnology and the imperative to enable their development in the areas that most need these technologies.

Project 3 of the Council Decision focused on developing the capacity of selected BWC States Parties to implement the BWC at the national level. This was achieved through the launching of the “EU Extended Assistance Programmes” in nine States Parties: Cameroon, Colombia, Cote d’Ivoire, Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal and Sierra Leone. Today we have the pleasure of welcoming one of the programme focal points for Malaysia, who will walk us through the assistance received by Malaysia and the important outputs produced as a result.

Working on these nine Extended Assistance Programmes has also left UNODA with important lessons regarding BWC implementation at the national level. These lessons have related to the need to establish proper and well-coordinated BWC architectures at national levels, the importance of streamlining national communication channels and focal points, the need to involve the right interlocutors in capacity development discussions and in the implementation of related activities, and the instrumental role of national ownership and sustained international support to ensure the success of time-limited activities and projects.

UNODA has also had the opportunity to witness first-hand the great progress that motivated states can achieve, even with very focused and short-term assistance, which Malaysia illustrates perfectly well. Another important takeaway from this capacity-development project is the high level of interest that BWC capacity development generates amongst states parties, which speaks much about a Convention that dates back to the seventies. In addition, through the in-country assistance provided, important cross-regional cooperation could be established amongst some states, including South-South cooperation, through an interesting cross-insemination of ideas and experiences; as well as the sharing of expertise and best practices between European experts and the beneficiary institutions in those BWC States Parties that benefitted from the Extended Assistance Programmes.
This cooperation will indeed continue after the conclusion of this Council Decision, as the foundations for long-term cooperation have been effectively established.

Another important contribution of this Council Decision has been the opportunity granted to experts and focal points from the beneficiary Extended Assistance Programme States Parties to attend BWC meetings in Geneva, such as the Meeting of Experts held this August in Geneva and the Meetings of States Parties in 2017 and this year. This enables these States Parties to actively participate in the important decision-making processes related to the Convention and to gain a deeper understanding of the processes underway at the political decision-making level.

In summary, thanks to the support provided by the EU, we have made important steps towards strengthening the foundations that underpin the success of the BWC: its effective implementation, universal adherence, and integrated coordination among different stakeholders, including those in the science and technology fields. We hope to continue our remarkable cooperation with the EU following the expiration of the current Council Decision in order to carry forward the significant progress achieved through the activities outlined above and sustain the important partnerships that have been established through this Council Decision.

These collective steps are what will ultimately lead us to achieving our common goal of building a more secure, peaceful and safer world and reaching the objectives of our Disarmament Agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you.