Statement by Ambassador Robert Wood  
Special Representative for Biological Weapons Convention Issues  
United States of America  

“General exchange of views”  
Preparatory Committee Meeting  
For the Eighth Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Review Conference  
Geneva, August 8, 2016  

Mr. Chairman,  

As we gather for the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee, I would like to congratulate you, the ISU, and all States Parties for the progress made to date in fostering a fruitful preparatory process, which we hope will lay the groundwork for a productive outcome of the Eighth Review Conference. I assure you, Mr. Chairman, of my delegation’s full support as we work to achieve this worthy goal.  

My delegation extends a warm welcome to Angola as our 175th State Party. We are pleased that our numbers are steadily growing and appreciate the efforts of other States Parties and the ISU to encourage universal membership. Increased membership in the BWC and growing participation in Confidence-Building Measures underscore the importance of the BWC in contributing to international peace and security.  

Mr. Chairman, the 8th Review Conference takes place at a sobering time. The repeated use of chemical weapons should be a clear reminder that some remain willing to take up weapons that the international community has judged to be unacceptable. The impressive advances in the life sciences that have brought so many benefits also place biological weapon capabilities within reach of more State and non-State actors than ever before. And the Ebola outbreak in West Africa has shown us in the starkest terms how destructive disease can be, and how important each nation’s capacity to detect and respond to outbreaks is to the international community as a whole. This year’s Review Conference is, therefore, both an opportunity and a test of our resolve: the threats are real, and require a serious response. We must seize the
opportunity to confront these threats by taking stronger national and international action, now, before the threats become a reality.

It is this need for action that makes the substantive preparatory process we agreed upon in December so important. A thorough exchange of views this week will help us to achieve a strong outcome in November. The significant contributions made by many States Parties at our April meeting demonstrated the wisdom of that decision.

The United States submitted to previous BWC meetings a total of five working papers, one of them jointly with India, containing proposals for the RevCon. We have updated two of those papers, including proposed draft Final Document language on Articles III and V. We look forward to discussing these proposals later this week.

Mr. Chairman, the United States wishes to build on and strengthen many of the understandings and agreements reached at past RevCons. This includes strong language on the need to take steps, as BWC States Parties, to deal with biological threats from non-state actors. The United States shares concerns that have been expressed regarding biological, as well as chemical terrorism, and believes that we should address these concerns in the context of the existing international framework. We have a number of strong tools, such as the CWC, the Terrorism Bombing Convention, UNSCR 1540, the Global Partnership, and the BWC itself, all of which can and should be used and enhanced to help mitigate the terrorist threat. We should work here in Geneva to do so through strong Final Document language, new decisions to strengthen implementation, and a strong new intersessional process. The RevCon affords us the opportunity to act expeditiously to address immediate concerns now.

We would also like to build on past progress at BWC RevCons on other aspects of national implementation of the Convention. The joint U.S.-India paper I mentioned, in which we propose measures to implement Article III, provides only one example. Equally important is each Party’s confidence that others are faithfully implementing the BWC, which has led us to a number of specific proposals to strengthen confidence building and consultation procedures. These proposals include the sharing of more useful information on a routine basis through CBMs
and the development of a wider array of tools for addressing questions, consistent with Article V, as they inevitably arise. We believe that it should be made very clear that the use of the mechanisms available under this article does not by itself constitute an accusation of noncompliance.

Along with CBMs, the intersessional program that has just been completed included a biennial focus on Article VII. We heard constructive proposals and dialogue on this topic in April, but political differences on aspects of it persist and must be bridged before we can agree on meaningful action. We hope that, at the RevCon, States Parties will build such bridges and commit to examining existing international assistance mechanisms, their relationship to Article VII obligations under the Convention, and any remaining gaps that should be addressed within the BWC. Sadly, the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa has demonstrated that more international engagement and stronger capacity are needed to prepare for future outbreaks. It is clear that public health capacity in each country matters to all.

Finally – and most importantly – Mr. Chairman, the United States joins other States Parties in seeking a more effective intersessional program. The biological challenges we face are serious, and we need to take seriously how we organize ourselves to work together to address them. Our ideas for how to do this are found in the U.S. working paper “Strengthening the Ability to Take Action: An Essential Agenda for the Eighth Review Conference”. This paper was revised based on input from other States Parties before the April PrepCom, and we recently asked our embassies to seek comments from capitals. We look forward to discussing our ideas further with you this week and in the weeks leading up to the RevCon.

These ideas include more focused expert work, more oversight of the process by a steering committee comprising BWC leadership, and a clearer delineation of the types of decisions Meetings of States Parties are authorized to take. I wish to emphasize that the approach that we propose will take more meeting time and more resources from States Parties. But we firmly believe that working together to make the BWC a stronger and more effective instrument for countering the threats presented by the misuse of biology for malevolent purposes is well worth the relatively small additional expense such a new work program would cost.
Mr. Chairman,

My delegation looks forward to working with all States Parties to prepare for a successful Review Conference that charts a path to more effective implementation of the BWC to stem the biological threat that we all face.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.