Thank you Mr. President,

Finland fully aligns itself with the statement to be made by the European Union and would like to add some remarks from a national perspective.

Let me start by congratulating you Mr. President for assuming your duties. Finland will contribute actively and fully support you in undertaking your tasks.

The BTWC has done its part in preventing the use of biological weapons. But in the light of the new technological advances, rapid exchange of information and also the emergence of non-state-parties we need to make sure that the convention and its practical implementation will live up to its expectations also in the future.

We consider it important to establish structures that might contribute to a better functioning of the Convention, and to strengthen the ability to take collective action in between the Review Conferences. This would be of specific importance in the area of science and Technology (S&T) due to the rapid advancement within life sciences and biotechnology, which can have both positive and negative impact on the BTWC. In this regard Norway, Sweden and Finland have tabled a paper that hopefully provides some useful elements in terms of science and technology in a run up for the review conference. Let me now run through this paper.
Article XII of the BTWC addresses the importance of taking into account new scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention. This can be achieved by engaging scientists in an elaborate, extended and continuous analytical work that directly benefits the operation of the Convention, serving the object and purpose of the Article XII. The annual Meeting of Experts as part of the intersessional programme is useful. Nevertheless its contribution to the BTWC could be enhanced further if annual topics, reflecting the priorities decided by the annual Meeting of the States Parties, would guide its work. This would require States Parties to nominate national experts possessing know-how on specific topics to serve as members of a more structured scientific open-ended group, administered by the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) who could also have a role as a rapporteur. Others proposals made in this regard also provide valuable contribution for further elaboration of this issue.

It would be important to invite variety of specialists from academia, civil society and industry, serving in their personal capacity, when required. Experts should represent cross-disciplinary interests as the nature of the BTWC requires a multitude of different elements to be taken into account in the scientific work.

As science and scientific work focuses on a diversity of topics in various parts of the world, mechanisms to enable participation of scientists from different regions in this important work should be explored. The work of scientists is technical, not political. Nevertheless, the experts should represent the diversity of States Parties as this would be essential to gain a full understanding of specific topics as they are understood in different parts of the world.

The spread of infectious diseases is a global threat in developing as well as developed countries. The existences of outbreaks of diseases that endanger lives place great strains on national health care systems and even hamper sustainable economic growth. Moreover, many of the emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases as well as classic endemic diseases represent potential biological threats. Therefore, an increased focus on research and development efforts and international collaboration is needed.
The BTWC Review Conference should encourage and support enhanced international cooperation in life sciences, supporting national health systems and addressing global health threats. In particular, the Review Conference should recall the obligations set out in the international health regulations (IHR) and the on-going crisis reform process in the WHO. The ISU of the BTWC is not an operational agency in the field of international co-operation and assistance, but the Unit could contribute, within its capacities, towards the full implementation of Article X of the Convention in close partnership with the mandated agencies. In addition, the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), the G7 Global Partnership and various bilateral and multilateral programs also represent possible channels for the implementation of Article X.

We have left the administrative details of our proposal rather open-ended for a good reason, we first need to establish the substance we want out of enhanced science and technology process. When this is clear we would be in a position to see which structure better serves the substantive needs of the process. What is crystal clear though is the need to have the South and North to sit at the same table to set the priorities for this process.

There are a variety of proposals on science and technology related issues that have been tabled by the States Parties in the run up for this preparatory committee meeting and more might be coming. It is also to be welcomed that the civil society is reflecting the same issue in these corridors today. Sheer number of these proposal make is clear that some progress in this field could be expected as an outcome of the review conference in November. Mr. President, I hope that elements provided by Finland, Norway and Sweden are helpful in this work.

Thank you