Statement

under agenda item 5: General Debate,

Meeting of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, Geneva, 3 – 6 December 2019

by H.E. Ambassador Robbert Jan Gabriëlse

Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
to the Conference on Disarmament
Mr. Chairman,

Let me start with congratulating you as Chair of this Meeting of States Parties of the BTWC and you can count on the full support of my delegation. In addition, to the statement to be delivered by the European Union, we would like to make following remarks in our national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

We look back with satisfaction at the Meeting of Experts of August this year and hereby would like to thank the MX chairs for their able handling of these meetings and the reports they produced. This years’ Meeting of States Parties marks the halfway point in our Review Cycle and the intersessional programme agreed in 2017. During this and last year, we have seen fruitful debates during the Meetings of Experts, in which various proposals to strengthen the convention and enhance its implementation have been put forward. We welcome utilizing this MSP to discuss the respective proposals and carefully consider which of those ideas seem most promising of achieving consensus at the Ninth Review Conference in 2021. This will help guide us to focus our debates during next years’ Meetings of Experts and allow us to make tangible progress, with a view towards a successful and efficient Review Conference.

Allow me to highlight one of the issues that was discussed extensively during the Meeting of Experts and which seems increasingly relevant. We have been witnessing increasing international awareness of the need for the BTWC to react to rapid developments in biotechnology in order to remain effective and relevant. In this context, the Netherlands, together with Sweden, co-sponsored a working paper by Germany on a scientific and technological expert’s advisory forum.

Mr. Chairman,

Also outside Geneva, many efforts have been made to further strengthen the Convention over the past years. The Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP) and the European Union made valuable contributions in this regard, including supporting ways to strengthen national implementation and thereby the BTWC.

In this context, I would like to draw attention to the biosecurity training provided by the experts from the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment to support countries in East Africa (Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania) and a biosecurity checklist jointly developed with Malaysia. By means of this checklist, countries can address their laboratory safety and security posture to enhance laboratory biosecurity. The tool can be tailored to country-specific needs and has been made publicly available.

As current chair of the Global Health Security Agenda, the Netherlands, plays an active role in supporting countries to enhance their health security indicators to the level of ‘demonstrated capacity’. The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment intends to continue to play a coordinating role in the Global Health Security Agenda Action Package on Biosafety and Biosecurity.

Mr. Chairman,

As a prerequisite for any steps towards the institutional strengthening of the BTWC, the Netherlands remains concerned by this Convention’s financial sustainability. The weak financial situation continues to seriously threaten both the holding of meetings under the Convention, as well as the existence of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU). It thereby hampers us from having substantive discussions and making progress in this field. Political commitment to the BTWC and to effective multilateralism is not only demonstrated by a commitment to refrain from the use of biological weapons, but also by
fulfilling the obligation to pay assessed contributions on time and in full. We call – once again - upon States Parties that have not yet done so, to fulfill their financial obligations without delay, to avoid possible negative impacts on the proper functioning of the BTWC.

Thank you.