Statement by Ambassador DB Venkatesh Varma
Permanent Representative of India to the CD
At the Resumed Prepcom for the
Eighth Review Conference of the BWC
8 August 2016

Mr President,

We have every confidence that under your leadership, preparations for a successful Review Conference in November this year are in very capable hands. We assure you of the full cooperation of the Indian delegation. We welcome Angola to the Convention as its newest State Party.

2. India associates itself with the statement made by the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-aligned Movement and Other States this morning. Our delegation had made a detailed statement at the April Prepcom. Hence we would like to focus our remarks now to some aspects which we feel are important for the Eight Review Conference.

3. The Review Conference is an important opportunity to review the implementation of the Convention and adopt a forward looking declaration, taking into account not just compliance of State Parties of their obligations under the Convention but also to address emerging challenges emanating from proliferation trends, including the threat posed by terrorists or other non-state actors seeking access to biological agents or toxins for terrorist purposes. We would like the Review Conference to come out with agreement on strong measures against bio-terrorism.

4. India is committed to the full implementation of the BWC. India supports the objective of a multilaterally agreed mechanism for verification of compliance that can provide the assurance of compliance by States Parties and act as a deterrent against non-compliance. India shares the widespread interest amongst States Parties to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention through the negotiation and conclusion of a Protocol for that purpose covering all provisions of the Convention. The Review Conference will provide an occasion to assess whether there is sufficient political will and support for taking this forward on the basis of consensus.

5. CBMs are an important transparency measure to enhance trust but are not an alternative to an effective mechanism for verification of compliance. CBMs are not declarations and cannot be treated as such for
assessing non-compliance. India is willing to look at proposals to update CBM formats related to the object and purposes of the Convention and in a manner that do not impose an undue burden on State parties. India has been up to date in submission of its CBMs. States Parties should live up to their commitments to submit CBMs, and this should be underlined by the Review Conference.

6. Review of new scientific and technological developments of relevance to the Convention is mandated by Article XII. While India submitted a Working Paper on conducting S&T review at the last Review Conference, we are willing to give consideration to various proposals, including the one tabled by the Russian Federation as well as the useful summation of various proposals contained in the Working Paper tabled by Switzerland. There is need for reaching common understandings on a framework and criteria for assessing risks of relevance to the Convention. In our view, measures taken to mitigate biological risks should be proportional to the assessed risk and not hamper legitimate peaceful activities including international cooperation. Further, there should be no hindrance to peaceful activities such as vaccine development, which are important for developing countries for meeting their public health needs.

7. The full and effective implementation of Article X of the Convention is important to generate equitable benefits for States Parties, in particular developing countries. In pursuance of the decision of the last Review Conference, India submitted a Working Paper in December 2014 containing its National Report on Article X Implementation. We hope that measures to further strengthen implementation of Article X, building upon those agreed at the last Review Conference, will find support at the next Review Conference.

8. While India continues to attach high importance to the full and effective implementation of Article X, we believe that strengthened implementation of Article III would ensure that cooperation envisaged under Article X is taken forward in mutual confidence. With the aim of building broad based support in the BWC, India joined the United States in submitting a Working Paper in 2015 entitled ‘Strengthening Implementation of Article III of the BTWC’. We hope to issue this as a document of the Prepcom with specific suggested language for appropriate decisions at the Review Conference. In our view, a forward looking cooperative approach, as contained in this Working Paper, is better at finding common ground than those that only deepen old divisions.
9. Article VII assistance is a legal obligation under the Convention which cannot be sidestepped by making artificial linkages with Article X. There is a widely felt need to fill the various gaps in the international community’s capacity to respond effectively and provide assistance to States Parties exposed to dangers as a result of violation of the BWC. India and France proposed in 2015 the establishment of a database for assistance in the framework of Article VII. This will be issued as a document of this Prepcom with a list of cosponsors and we join France in inviting others to do so as well.

10. The Review Conference will provide an opportunity for us to look back at the last inter-sessional process and look to the future operation of the Convention. The long-term sustainability of the Convention should be rooted in legally binding measures with all State Parties endowing collective confidence in the Convention rather than pursing measures to protect their specific national interests. In this, the BWC could draw inspiration from the success of the CWC. We are aware that achieving this goal will take time. In the meantime, we should look for practical and pragmatic solutions on specific issues for follow up in the inter-sessional period, with decision making on agreed issues and follow up as and when consensus is possible, while maintaining the integrity of Review Conference decisions. Appropriate decisions on taking forward universality and on an effective and representative ISU- fit for purpose and with adequate financing, would also need to be taken.

11. The success of the Eighth Review Conference will depend as much on an intensive and inclusive preparatory process as on the political will that States Parties would bring to the table. India supports a robust consultation process as envisaged by UNGA Resolution 70/74. As part of broader outreach, India will be hosting a Regional Workshop on the Eight Review Conference in cooperation with UNODA and the EU on 29-30 August in New Delhi and we will be honoured with your presence and feel privileged that the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr Kim Won-Soo has kindly consented to deliver a Special Address. We hope that the deliberations of this Workshop will contribute to a successful Review Conference.

Thank you.