Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, please accept our warm congratulations Ambassador Yann Hwang, on your effective stewardship of the 2019 Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention. Our best wishes are also extended to the two Vice Chairs Ambassador Adrian Vierita of Romania and Ambassador Andreano Erwin of Indonesia. We are confident that during this meeting, we could build consensus on a forward looking outcome to successfully achieve the objectives of the Convention.

Since its entry into force in 1975, nearly 45 years ago, the BWC, the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons, has established a strong norm against the use or threat of use of biological weapons. However, the potential use or threat of use of biological agents and toxins as an instrument of war and terror remains a cause for concern.
In order to be able to respond effectively to any future challenges, it is essential to strengthen and improve the effectiveness and implementation of all articles of the BWC. Sri Lanka accords high priority to this task.

The continuous efforts towards achieving universalization of the Convention and bringing remaining states within its scope is of utmost importance. We welcome in this context, the ratification of the Convention by United Republic of Tanzania on 14 August 2019. We also wish to acknowledge the work of the Chair and the Implementation Support Unit towards universalization of the Convention and the significant progress made during 2019 as outlined in the report of the Chairman on Universalization Activities.

We also appreciate the support extended by the ISU to State Parties to administer and implement the Convention, facilitate the exchange of Confidence Building Measures, establish and administer the assistance database as mandated at the Seventh Review Conference, to administer the sponsorship programme and support implementation by States Parties of the decisions and recommendations of the Review Conference.
Mr. Chairman

Scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention are important for peaceful purposes. The ‘Annual Global Forum on Scientific Advances Important to the BWC’ held yesterday, provided the opportunity for discussion between scientists and global policy makers on emerging and future capabilities in biology and biotechnology relevant to the Convention. It is important to promote and enhance international cooperation and assistance for peaceful purposes including scientific–technical exchanges, particularly under Article X of the Convention. Sri Lanka attaches priority to the operationalization and full implementation of Article X, which would generate equitable benefits for State parties, in particular, developing countries, in order to strengthen national implementation, assistance, response and preparedness, as well as in the areas of health, agriculture etc.

Mr. Chairman,

While a range of views have been expressed today on a multilateral agreement on a mechanism for verification of compliance, Sri Lanka shares
the view of the Non-Aligned Movement that in order to strengthen the full implementation of the Convention, it is necessary to resume multilateral negotiations towards conclusion of a legally binding Protocol dealing with all articles of the Convention and including verification measures.

Confidence Building Measures are an important voluntary tool to promote transparency in implementation of the Convention and should continue. However, CBMs alone do not provide assurance of all provisions being realized by all States Parties and cannot be used as a tool to assess compliance for which a legally binding mechanism with provision for verification is required.

Mr. Chairman,

Universalization of the Convention and implementation of its Articles, both at the national level and at the international level, is key to ensuring a world free from the threat of biological weapons.

At the national level, we have taken a number of initiatives for implementation, which range from introduction of guidelines and biosafety
manuals in dealing with hazardous agents, to training of staff and awareness-raising.

Further, in keeping with the WHO International Health Regulations 2005, initiatives have been taken for public health emergency preparedness at ports of entry including the development of a National Aviation Preparedness Plan for Public Health Emergencies’ and ‘Standard Operating Procedures for prevention, early warning, and response to public health events at points of entry.

The health system in Sri Lanka has the capacity to report on unusual outbreaks of disease. However, it is essential that the capacity to respond to sudden unexpected outbreaks is strengthened through the sharing of new technological advances.

Strengthening the national capacity remains imperative, and a host of measures are being taken to achieve it on a medium to long term basis. This includes training and capacity building, as well as upgrading the laboratories and research institutes. It would help Sri Lanka to be fully equipped with
capabilities to survey, detect, diagnose and combat infectious diseases as well as other possible biological threats undermining peace and security.

The decision taken at the VIII Review Conference to maintain a Sponsorship Programme funded by voluntary contributions from States Parties to increase participation of developing States Parties has benefited many including Sri Lanka and we appreciate the generous support, which brings together experts from diverse countries, thus contributing to informal networks for future cooperation.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its commitment to advancing the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention and to work towards strengthening national capacities in cooperation with other stakeholders for full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Thank you.