Mr. Chairman,

Last year the international community welcomed UN Security Council Resolution 2118 and the September 27th OPCW Executive Council decision that legally mandated the complete elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons program. These decisions were an historic and unprecedented achievement that allowed for the removal and verified destruction of Syria’s declared chemical weapons -- a significant step toward the complete dismantling of the Syrian chemical weapons program. This effort could not have been accomplished without the commitment and resolve of the international community. President Obama expressed his gratitude to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission and the entire international coalition for this extraordinary achievement. President Obama also made clear that the task of ensuring that Syria’s chemical weapons program has been entirely eliminated is far from over. Serious concerns remain; including Syria’s continued use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people in direct contravention of its obligations under Resolution 2118, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the decisions of the OPCW Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, set up by the Director-General to establish the facts around allegations that chlorine has been used as a chemical weapon, has confirmed the use of such a chemical in its second report dated 10 September 2014. The United States commends the courage and dedication of the Mission and its professional and impartial efforts to ascertain the facts regarding chemical weapons use in Syria. We join the rest of the international community in strongly supporting the Director-General’s decision to have the Fact-Finding Mission continue its work.

This second report contains a compelling set of conclusions and evidentiary findings implicating the Syrian government in deadly chemical weapons attacks.
against three villages in northern Syria during April and May of 2014. The Fact-Finding Mission concluded that the testimony of primary witnesses and supporting documentation, including medical reports and other relevant information, constitutes a compelling confirmation with a high degree of confidence that chlorine was used as a weapon, systematically and repeatedly in the villages of Talmanes, Al Tamanah, and Kafr Zeta in northern Syria. The Fact-Finding Mission emphasized that “in describing the incidents involving the release of toxic chemicals, witnesses invariably connected the devices to helicopters flying overhead.” It is well known that the Syrian Government is the only party to the conflict in Syria possessing helicopters or any other aerial capability.

Mr. Chairman, the use of chlorine or any other toxic chemical as a weapon is a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of Resolution 2118. Such a breach raises serious concerns about the willingness of Syria to comply with its fundamental treaty obligations not to possess or use chemical weapons.

We are also concerned about Syria’s declaration, as it contains gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies which give rise to important questions and concerns about the declaration’s accuracy and completeness. We call on Syria to cooperate fully with the OPCW and promptly begin destruction of its remaining chemical weapon production facilities. The Syrian Arab Republic must provide the international community with credible evidence to support its assurances that it has fully abandoned its chemical weapons program. This cannot be achieved while use of chemical weapons continues and new allegations of such use continue to be made. Complete and accurate declarations must be provided, and destruction operations must be completed promptly and in full in order to prevent further use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people. The Syrian CW file remains open and will not be closed until all of these issues are addressed and Syria complies with its obligations under the CWC and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

Mr. Chairman, on other CWC related matters, the United States looks forward to working closely with States Parties to meaningfully advance the work and recommendations of the Third Review Conference held in April 2013. While there is more work to be done in our efforts to further strengthen the implementation of the CWC, we remain encouraged by the progress made by the OPCW and its extraordinary efforts in working toward a world free of chemical weapons. The OPCW has accomplished a great deal and remains an indispensable multilateral body with a global responsibility.
For our part, the United States continues to act on opportunities to accelerate destruction and has safely destroyed almost 90 percent of our chemical weapons stockpile under OPCW verification. We continue our steadfast commitment to the CWC and will continue working in a transparent manner towards the complete destruction of our remaining chemical weapons.

The United States remains fully committed to the charge given in the preamble of the Chemical Weapons Convention, that all States Parties “determined for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, through the implementation of the provisions of this Convention....” We must stand together to make this goal a reality.

Mr. Chairman, as we pursue these important goals, we must not lose sight of the threat posed by biological weapons, whether in the hands of states or non-state actors. The Biological Weapons Convention bans the development, production, and stockpiling of such weapons. It embodies an aspiration as profound as that of the CWC: to completely exclude the possibility of biological agents and toxins being used as weapons. The United States strongly supports the BWC.

The 7th BWC Review Conference took steps to strengthen the Convention’s contribution to international security, establishing an ambitious agenda of important topics for ongoing work. But this agenda has not been matched by the resources or political will needed to deliver results. Even as we consolidate gains under the existing process, we must begin to look toward the 8th RevCon. What issues should we seek to address over the coming years, and how should we seek to address them?

Some will call – inevitably – for another effort to negotiate an all-encompassing supplementary treaty or protocol. We’ve been down that road. The problems are well known – and, despite the popular narrative, not limited to U.S. objections. Under this approach, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This is a formula for years of inaction. The BW threat won’t wait for us.

There is a better way. We can strengthen our intersessional process. We can – like so many other international entities – adopt decisions on the things we agree upon, while continuing to discuss those on which we do not. And there IS agreement on a great deal. We agree on the need to strengthen national implementation; on the importance of international cooperation, especially to build nations’ capacity to address challenges to health security posed by infectious disease and toxins; on the need to give practical effect to the mutual assistance provisions of Article VII.
And – even if we do not agree on how to go about it – we agree on the need to find ways to strengthen confidence that Parties to the BWC are living up to their obligations.

Mr. Chairman, we HAVE a treaty. We don’t need to wait for some distant day when the stars align and another one emerges – and the threats we face will most certainly not wait. Let’s take the tools that we have, strengthen them where necessary, and put them to use.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.