Mr. Chairman,

A little more than two years ago the international community welcomed the unprecedented achievement of Resolution 2118 and the September 27th OPCW Executive Council decision that allowed for the removal and verified destruction of Syria’s declared chemical weapons program. However, let us be clear that just a month prior to such an accomplishment, the Syrian Government launched a horrific attack with the nerve agent sarin against an opposition-controlled suburb of Damascus – leaving nearly 1,500 dead, many of them children. The subsequent accession of the Syrian Government to the Chemical Weapons Convention was an act of political expediency in the face of mounting international pressure; unfortunately, it has not proven to be either a moral conversion on the part of the Syrian Government, or an actual renunciation of chemical weapons. Syria, like all other States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is legally bound not to use chemical weapons under any circumstances and not to possess them. Regrettably, the United States - indeed all of the members in this chamber - have cause for serious concern that the Government of Syria has violated and continues to violate both of these fundamental obligations.

Mr. Chairman,

Just a year ago, on September 10, 2014, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, in its report, confirmed the use of chemical weapons in Syria. There were a compelling set of conclusions and evidentiary findings in the report implicating the Syrian government in deadly chemical weapons attacks during April and May of 2014. The report further concluded that the testimony of primary witnesses and supporting documentation confirmed with a high degree of confidence that a toxic chemical – likely chlorine – was used as a weapon, systematically and repeatedly in attacks against three opposition-controlled villages in northwest Syria.

Subsequently, the OPCW Executive Council in February of this year expressed “its strong conviction that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.” In doing so, it voiced its serious concern regarding the conclusions of the Fact-Finding Mission report. A month
later, on March 6, 2015, the UN Security Council, in Resolution 2209, echoed the very same concerns and convictions of the Executive Council. Even now the United States awaits the findings of the ongoing Fact-Finding Mission’s efforts with respect to other allegations of CW use in Syria.

Mr. Chairman,

While serious concerns continue regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria, a significant step has been made to identify those involved in CW use in Syria. On August 7, 2015, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2235, which established an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. This important international mechanism is the culmination of a year-long diplomatic effort that began with the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and sends a clear message to all those involved in chemical weapons attacks in Syria that the international community has tools to identify you. The Joint Investigative Mechanism will soon be operational and begin its work “to identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups, or governments who were perpetrators, organizers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons” in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Chairman,

Concerns about continued chemical weapons use in Syria are further compounded by the recent OPCW Technical Secretariat’s report on discrepancies and omissions in Syria’s declaration and related information submissions. Despite 18 months of intense consultations with Syrian authorities, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been unable to verify that all of the chemicals, munitions, and facilities that comprised the Syrian chemical weapons program have been declared and, as required by the Convention, decisions of the OPCW Executive Council, and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118, eliminated.

The objective of the historic decision of September 2013 and its UN counterpart, Security Council resolution 2118, is the complete elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons program. Verifying the accuracy and completeness of Syria’s CWC declaration and related submissions is absolutely fundamental to the achievement of that compelling objective.

Mr. Chairman,

In that same spirit of determination we must address and take seriously the threat of biological weapons. Technological advances and the diffusion of knowledge, for all their positive effects, place biological weapons capabilities within reach of more nations and terrorist groups than ever before. The world is
currently witnessing renewed use of chemical weapons; there is no reason to think such actors will draw a moral line at the use of biological weapons. And the Ebola outbreak in West Africa has demonstrated the international community’s vulnerability to infectious disease, raising troubling questions about our collective ability to respond to the deliberate use of such a pathogen. We must take stronger international action to confront this threat – and next year’s BWC Review Conference (RevCon) is our opportunity.

Some governments are again calling for the negotiation of a legally binding protocol to the Convention as the solution to every problem. My delegation understands why this may seem appealing, but it is, unfortunately, a road that goes nowhere. But we are not faced with a choice of doing everything or doing nothing. By acknowledging our differences, setting them respectfully to one side, and focusing on practical steps that build on areas of agreement, the RevCon can take steps to rapidly and significantly strengthen the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

The RevCon should take steps to strengthen national implementation, including effective national systems of export control. In this connection, the United States is pleased to have submitted for the December BWC Meeting of States Parties a joint paper with India on strengthening implementation of Article III. The RevCon should also agree on measures to strengthen confidence in the Convention, building on existing measures and real-world experience. And it should take steps to ensure greater international preparedness for a biological weapons attack or disease outbreak, both by strengthening mechanisms to support Article VII of the Convention and by working to build national capacities.

No matter how much we accomplish at the RevCon itself, however, we will also need to equip ourselves to support, implement, and build on these agreements in the years to follow – and so the Conference should also take steps to strengthen our ability to take collective action at and between RevCons. We should act to enhance the quality of our expert deliberations; strengthen the authority of the annual Meeting of States Parties; reinforce the Implementation Support Unit; and provide greater oversight and coordination of our collective work by establishing a steering committee.

Mr. Chairman

This approach to the RevCon will allow BWC States Parties to take action where agreement can be found, establish structures to support the implementation of those agreements, and allow for ongoing work on issues that require further attention. Let’s not wait until the day when we can agree on everything. Instead,
let us take action where and when we find agreement, to create a safer, more secure world. The United States stands ready to work with all BWC States Parties to achieve this important goal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.