Mr. Chair,

This year has seen positive developments regarding Libya’s chemical weapons, but disturbing revelations about Syria’s chemical weapons programme and chemical weapons use in Syria and Iraq.

The good news is that Libya’s stockpile of sulphur mustard has been eliminated, funded in part by a C$6 million contribution by Canada. This year, remaining precursors, at risk of falling into the control of Daesh, were repackaged and transported to a facility in Germany for destruction. Canada contributed an additional C$725,000 to this multi-year, multinational effort, which marked the final chapter of the elimination of Libya’s chemical weapons program. Canada applauds the financial and in-kind contributions made by our partners and commends the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for its coordinating role.

Syria is not a good news story.

While the destruction of Syria’s declared chemical weapons program – for which Canada contributed more than C$22 million – is nearing completion, this accomplishment has been overshadowed by Syria’s incomplete and inaccurate Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) declaration and by continued chemical weapons use. Gaps, discrepancies and inconsistencies identified by the Technical Secretariat raise concerns that Syria has retained a covert chemical weapons capability.

The Declaration Assessment Team has now concluded that it is unable to resolve all identified issues. It cannot fully verify that Syria has submitted an accurate and complete declaration, and without a change in approach by Syria, further assessment efforts are unlikely to yield results. This situation is unacceptable. We call on the Syrian regime to disclose the extent of its chemical weapons program, to comply with the CWC and UN Security Council Resolution 2118, to resolve all ambiguities with its declaration, and to destroy its remaining chemical weapons facilities.

As well, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, which Canada supported with a contribution C$2.6 million, has attributed responsibility for at least two chlorine attacks to Syrian government forces and for one attack with sulphur mustard to Daesh. The OPCW and the UNSC now face an unprecedented situation: a State Party has been found to have used chemical weapons in violation of the CWC, UNSC resolutions and international humanitarian law. Canada is gravely concerned by these findings. The perpetrators must be held accountable and brought to justice.

The confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria means that we must reiterate our condemnation of all use of chemical weapons, and reiterate that we urge all states to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. Chair,
Turning to biological weapons, Canada considers the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) to be a cornerstone of the global multilateral disarmament framework. The Convention is increasingly important, as the threat of biological weapons development and use, particularly by Non-State Actors, is of growing concern.

While developments in the life sciences are making contributions to global health, they also create new concerns. Pathogens used for public health purposes could be stolen by those who wish to do harm. Advances in biotechnology may enable the recreation of extinct pathogens. We cannot simply ban these activities. The benefits of allowing access to biological agents by scientists cannot be overstated.

The Eighth Review Conference will offer an opportunity to strengthen the BTWC’s ban on biological weapons without hampering legitimate research.

Canada was pleased to co-host, along with China and the Convention’s Implementation Support Unit, a workshop on the Eighth Review Conference in Wuxi, China. The workshop fostered a dialogue on the decisions to be taken next month.

Canada’s priority is to improve the review of science and technology within the Convention, and promote effective national implementation of the Convention in ways that permit legitimate life sciences research to continue.

While States Parties participate in productive discussions during the intersessional meetings, it’s still hard to reach common understandings. We seek amendments to the intersessional meeting structure that facilitate an ongoing dialogue that leads to actionable outcomes. We also support granting the Meeting of States Parties additional decision-making authorities so that effective actions can be taken in a timely manner.

The lack of universality in the BTWC remains a challenge. In welcoming the recent additions of Angola and Côte d’Ivoire, we also encourage States outside of the Convention to join as soon as possible.

Mr. Chair, the States Parties of the BTWC have much work to do next month, but it is clear that they have the good will and positive intent required for strengthening the Convention. The Review Conference President can count on Canada’s support.

Thank you.