Mr Chairman

The international community must remain steadfast in countering the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons - and we need to remain resolute that there are no circumstances justifying the use of such weapons.

Tragically, atrocities still occur. Australia remains deeply concerned about ongoing reports of chemical weapons use in Syria. The UN-Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found, in its third report, that the Syrian Government was responsible for using chemical weapons
against its own people in 2014 and 2015. And throughout this year, further reports of chemical attacks have been brought to the attention of the OPCW’s Fact-Finding Mission.

There is no doubt that the Syrian Government has violated international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and UNSCR 2118. We also note that the JIM report found that Da’esh had used chemical weapons. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by any party to this conflict.

We call on the international community to redouble efforts: to eliminate completely remaining chemical weapons stockpiles and production capabilities; to prevent the acquisition, production and use of chemical weapons; and to hold perpetrators accountable.

Australia will continue working with others to ensure the realisation of OPCW priorities, in particular preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. One particular focus is the use in law enforcement scenarios of aerosolised chemicals which affect the central nervous system.

We must continue to work collaboratively to adjust policies and regulations to reflect constantly-evolving new threats and technologies in the WMD field, including through robust export controls. The Australia Group brings together 42 members committed to harmonising export controls to prevent rogue states and terrorists from obtaining what they need to build chemical and biological weapons. Through the regular meetings of the Australia
Group, which we chair, we collaborate on new ways to curb chemical and biological weapons.

But to succeed in this task, we need the help of all countries. That's why Australia Group members are working closely with non-members, including those in our region, to share best practices and address how to strengthen our efforts at preventing the spread and use of these weapons.

Mr Chairman

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) not only underpins the international norms against biological weapons, but also facilitates global efforts to promote the peaceful uses of the life sciences.

But rapid advances in biosciences and biotechnology continue to make the pursuit of a biological weapons program ever more feasible for a growing number of countries, if they were to decide on such a regrettable course.

Against this background, Australia, as Chair of the Western Group in the BWC, remains committed to strengthening the Convention. Our immediate challenge is to ensure the BWC Review Conference, starting next month in Geneva, will unite us in our common aim of making this world a safer place. In collaboration with Pakistan, we will be using our good offices as facilitator on a future intersessional program, and the ISU, to assist our capable President designate, Ambassador George Molnar, to a successful
outcome. We urge all delegations to work collaboratively towards this end.

Australia is doing its part in helping build a response capability to alleged use of a biological weapon by hosting the first UNSG Mechanism skills training course in our region this week. High Representative Kim Won-soo at the High Level Panel underlined the importance of this response capability in his remarks to the plenary.

Mr Chairman

Australia welcomes the leadership demonstrated by Spain during the current UN Security Council Resolution 1540 Comprehensive Review process. We urge all UN Member States to fulfil their obligations under Resolution 1540 and other related Resolutions. This resolution remains central in combatting the challenge of WMD proliferation and we look forward to the outcomes of the Review process later in the year.

Thank you.