Mr. Chair,

Witnessing the repeated yet unacceptable use of chemical weapons in the course of the conflict in Syria for the fifth year in a row, it is high time to stop these violations, give effect to international law and uphold the universal norm against chemical weapons.

Switzerland took note of the third report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that comes to the conclusion that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces used chlorine in two of the six investigated cases while the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State' group used sulfur mustard in one of them. The investigation and its conclusions that are based on the findings of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) – in both the JIM and the FFM Switzerland was actively involved with the provision of support by Spiez Laboratory – are factual and impartial. Switzerland condemns in the strongest terms any use of chemical weapons by any party to the conflict in Syria.

Despite the accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the destruction of its declared stockpiles, the involvement of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces indicates an unprecedented breach of the country's obligations under the Convention. Likewise, the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors is a disturbing development that the OPCW and its States Parties must address. The national implementation of the provisions of the CWC by its States Parties and the strengthening of the OPCW's capabilities are essential requirements to tackle the challenges of chemical terrorism.

Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons and other serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. To this end, Switzerland repeats its demand that the Security Council refers the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in order to prosecute these crimes and bring all perpetrators to justice.

Mr. Chair,

Switzerland commends the efforts of the OPCW and its States Parties in relation to the removal and the commencement of the destruction of Libya's remaining chemical weapons. The Libyan situation shows how important it is for the OPCW to adapt to new threats and challenges and maintain the excellent and unique expertise it has acquired throughout the years in terms of the destruction of chemical weapons and its verification.

Mr. Chair,

Like the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is a key pillar of the international security and disarmament architecture. It will be important that the upcoming 8th Review Conference takes the necessary decisions to ensure that the Convention remains relevant in a rapidly changing environment.

The task ahead of us is significant and we welcome that a number of proposals for improvement have been made in the framework of the Conference's preparatory process. While many issues need to be addressed, that of the BWC intersessional process will certainly have to be an important focus of our efforts at the Review Conference. The intersessional process has been established to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention. However, the current set-up has not matched expectations and proven to be unable to meet its mandate of taking "effective action". The process could be significantly improved in a way to make the BWC more action-oriented and reinforce
its impact. To this end, proposals such as providing the Meeting of States Parties with the authority to take decisions on clearly-defined issues or replacing the annual Meeting of Experts with dedicated meetings on key topics should be seriously considered.

Switzerland is particularly convinced that an undertaking as complex as a thorough examination of developments in science and technology and their impact on the provisions of the Convention is extremely difficult to carry out in the existing intersessional format and the limited time available. A dedicated, technical process mandated to reviewing advances in science and technology would provide a more robust technical foundation on which to base our policy considerations in order to ensure the continued effective implementation and relevance of the Treaty.

We call on all States Parties to the BWC to seize the opportunity of the Review Conference in November to take the Convention forward and make it fit for the 21st Century.

Thank you.