Mr. Chairman, colleagues,

During this year, many Member States have acknowledged the 20th anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) through events reaffirming the solemn objective enshrined therein: “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.”

While the courageous work of the women and men of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has been extraordinary, the harsh reality finds that the CWC and the international norm against the use of chemical weapons remain under assault through the continued use of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors. Let’s be clear, the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere is a threat to all of us, everywhere. Following previous reports by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), it is undeniable that the Syrian regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons in violation of the CWC and UN Security Council Resolution 2118. The barbarism did not end there as, on April 4, 2017, the Syrian regime again used sarin gas in an attack on Khan Shaykhun, killing an estimated hundred children, women, and men, and injuring many more. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) concluded indisputably that sarin or a sarin-like substance was used in that attack. All those responsible for such heinous acts must be held accountable.

While the international community awaits the results of the findings of the JIM, the United States strongly supports the JIM’s renewal and lauds the highly professional manner in which the JIM and the FFM conduct their work.

This year also saw the use of chemical weapons on February 13 at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in the assassination of North Korean national Kim Jong-nam. The heinous act of using VX, one of the most dangerous nerve agents in the world, defies all human decency and the norms of the civilized world against the use of chemical weapons. All of those involved in perpetrating this deadly attack must be held accountable.

The events of this past year make it clear that the international community must do more to ensure the integrity and viability of the CWC and to preserve the international laws, norms, and standards against the use of chemical weapons. We must continue to collectively condemn in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor, and to hold all those who would use such weapons accountable. Anything less would be irresponsible.
Biological weapons historically have also been used, and terrorist groups, individuals and states continue to pursue them. The Biological Weapons Convention is our most important tool to prevent the use of disease as a weapon of war. But to do so, it must be implemented effectively. Unfortunately, BWC States Parties squandered the opportunity at the Eighth Review Conference (RevCon) to adopt a stronger intersessional program. Many delegations, including the United States, came to the RevCon with proposals for such a program, and a willingness to find an acceptable way forward. Regrettably, we did not succeed in that objective.

Nonetheless, the United States was reassured by the shared commitment to the Convention, to minimizing risks from weaponized pathogens, and to solidifying the global norm against the use of disease as a weapon. The increase in Treaty membership is also heartening, and we welcome Samoa as the 179th State Party.

Although Parties could not agree on a new work program at the RevCon, they tasked the December Meeting of States Parties (MSP) to reach agreement on a work program. We welcome Chairman-designate Indian Ambassador Gill’s efforts to prepare for a successful MSP, which in our view would provide for more focused, expert work on oversight of science and technology, national implementation, capacity building, and preparedness for, and response to, outbreaks of disease. Our cross-regional consultations indicate that many would support such a result as a step forward. We call on all States Parties to support such a work program at the upcoming MSP.

Finally, adequate funding for BWC work is essential. We welcome the recent payment of substantial overdue assessments, but many debts are still outstanding, and these debts in combination with structural financial problems will make it very difficult to pay ISU salaries at the beginning of the year. Both issues need urgent attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.