STATEMENT
BY

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DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON OTHER
WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

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Chairperson,

Given the horrific humanitarian consequences associated with the use of weapons of mass destruction, no cause could ever justify the use of such weapons by any actor under any circumstances. To my delegation it is clear that the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction should remain one of our key priorities. This includes the full and non-discriminatory implementation of all the provisions of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Chairperson,

South Africa recognises the central role of the CWC in enhancing international peace and security. We commend the work of the OPCW with the support of the international community over the last 20 years towards realizing the goal of a world free of chemical weapons. In this regard, we welcome the significant progress achieved in the destruction of chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) across the globe. While around 96% of the more than 70 000 metric tonnes of deadly chemical warfare agents have already been destroyed, much work remains. Many old and abandoned chemical weapons continue to present hazards for people and the environment.

Chairperson,

We welcome the progress made by major possessor States Parties in destroying their remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, including the recently announced completion of the destruction process in the Russian Federation, which we hope would serve as inspiration for others that have yet to complete their destruction processes.

While welcoming the progress made towards the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons programme, we continue to be concerned about the reported use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals as weapons in Syria. No cause could ever justify the use of such weapons and it is imperative that those responsible be brought to book through a thorough investigation, free from any political interference. It is critical that any findings and conclusions should be based on verifiable and factual information so as to preserve the credibility of such investigations. In this regard, we look forward to the continuing work and report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

We also commend the Director-General’s Africa Programme and call on all CWC State Parties to support and further enhance capacity in Africa.

Chairperson,
South Africa reaffirms its commitment to strengthening the implementation of the BWC to ensure that our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons is achieved. My delegation remains concerned about the threat posed by naturally occurring organisms, as well as by those that could be deliberately manufactured and manipulated for use as weapons.

Apart from security considerations, the BWC has other benefits that present an opportunity for technical cooperation between State Parties to also address socio-economic challenges in developing countries. South Africa believes that greater international coordination and assistance is required to alleviate the burden of threat posed by biological agents. We therefore welcome initiatives such as the exchange in biological sciences and technology, the promotion of capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis, as well as the containment of infectious diseases, among many others, that could be further explored.

South Africa regrets that the 2016 BWC Review Conference was unable to reach consensus on a substantive outcome, as well as an intersessional programme for 2017–2020. My delegation welcomes the appointment of Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill of India, as Chair of the upcoming 2017 Meeting of States Parties to the Convention. South Africa will work constructively towards an outcome that would strengthen the Convention and its balanced implementation during the intersessional period leading towards a successful 2020 Review Conference.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, the universalisation of the BWC and the CWC is crucial for the effective eradication of all biological and chemical weapons. We welcome the recent accession of Samoa to the BWC and call upon those not yet party to these Conventions to join without further delay.

I thank you.