Mr. Chairman, Colleagues,

The challenge to preserve the international norm against the use of chemical weapons continues to be a daunting task with every new allegation, abhorrent attack, and senseless killing of the Syrian people by the Assad regime. Last month, Secretary Pompeo highlighted the U.S. government’s determination that the regime once again used chemical weapons in an attack on May 19 of this year in Latakia Province, Syria. It is imperative that the international community stand against CW use or we risk the normalization of it.

Mr. Chairman, this is precisely why the work of — and support to — the OPCW remains a vital part of preserving the global norm against the use of chemical weapons and the ideal platform to address future threats and challenges. In that view, the Twenty-Fourth Session of the OPCW’s Conference of the States Parties in November presents a rare and significant opportunity to add Novichok chemical families to the CWC Annex of Chemicals. These agents have no other use than to harm or kill, as seen in the UK towns of Salisbury and Amesbury. We call upon States Parties to support this addition.

Additionally, it is time to take concrete measures to address the threat posed by central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals, such as fentanyl. Twenty-four nations to include the United States have co-sponsored a draft decision that would make clear the understanding that the aerosolized use of CNS-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited.” We call upon States Parties to support this decision. As States Parties, we cannot acquiesce to non-compliance of the CWC; we have to call out such concerns and address them accordingly.

Mr. Chairman, other challenges to nonproliferation and disarmament are less dramatic, but still serious. There are practical steps that could be taken now to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and broad support for
doing so. However, a small number of States Parties have repeatedly blocked action, insisting that the only way ahead is to return to negotiations on a Protocol to the Convention. We could be strengthening implementation, ensuring prompt, effective assistance in the event of an intentional outbreak, and improving international cooperation. We are not. The United States calls on those obstructing progress to join in efforts to reach consensus on such measures. Those who continue to advocate for a new legal instrument, that is your right, but do not paralyze the BWC any longer. The other major challenge facing the BWC is its tenuous financial situation. Measures adopted last December have helped, but the only lasting solution is for States Parties to make their financial contributions on time and in full. Those in arrears should settle their debts without delay — and those who are financially able should consider contributions to the new Working Capital Fund.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.