Statement by the Representative of the Russian Federation in the First Committee of the 74th session of the UNGA within thematic debate on “Other types of WMD”
(New York, the UN Headquarters, October 23, 2019)

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished colleagues,

The Russian Federation was at the origin of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) and has consistently supported its strengthening. Our country has faithfully fulfilled its obligations under this international treaty. In 2017, three years ahead of the deadline declared in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) we destroyed the world’s largest arsenal of chemical weapons, around 40,000 tonnes. We call on the United States of America, which has all the financial and technological capacity to dispose of its remaining stockpiles of poisonous substances as soon as possible, to follow our example.

We note with satisfaction that 193 States are already parties to the Convention. In the course of contacts at all levels, we call on countries that are not
yet the Party to the CWC to join it. It is crucial that States Parties to the Convention fully implement all its provisions.

Russia is making every effort to improve the OPCW's functioning. Unfortunately, it has to be stated that the Organization is now literally split because of the outrageous politicization of the Syrian "chemical dossier", the orchestrated "Skripal case" and the illegitimate "attribution" imposed by a group of Western countries on the OPCW. The United States of America and its numerous allies have demonstratively moved away from consensus-based decision-making, and put to vote all fundamental issues.

Decisions by the Conference of the States Parties to give attributive functions to the OPCW Technical Secretariat "to identify those responsible" for the use of chemical weapons go beyond the CWC scope and trespass on the prerogatives of the UN Security Council. The implementation of their ideas poses a threat not only to the Convention itself, but also to the entire international system of WMD disarmament and non-proliferation. Such "innovations" in the CWC can be considered, if at all, only in accordance with Article XV of the Convention, which provides for an absolute consensus on this matter.

We believe that the "attributive mechanism" will not conduct an objective investigation. The Organization is still unable to arrange the activities of the relevant Fact-Finding Mission, to establish the facts of the use of chemical weapons in Syria (FFM). The FFM reports are based on evidence obtained remotely from opposition groups; investigations are conducted without following a clear chain of custody procedure specified in the CWC, i.e., the collection of evidence only by Mission experts on the scene. There are also questions about the staffing of the FFM, which mainly includes representatives of Western countries and their allies.

The latest striking example is the conclusions of the Mission's report on the investigation of the high-profile chemical incident in Duma on 7 April 2018. The document was written in an anti-Syrian manner for subsequent submission to the
"attributive mechanism" for consideration. It is now clear that by no means all the FFM experts share the Mission's conclusions; they tend to believe that the incident in question might have been staged. A number of independent international experts share similar views on these events and the quality of the FFM work.

We believe that the adoption of sanctions measures in international forums against Damascus, based on unsubstantiated accusations of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian armed forces, is absolutely unacceptable.

Russia consistently supports the creation of an impartial and highly professional international mechanism under the aegis of the UNSC that would investigate all cases of "chemical terrorism" in the Middle East without exception in strict accordance with the high standards of the CWC. All of our proposals have always met with strong resistance from a number of Western countries, which prefer to use the continued provocations with the use of poisonous substances to discredit the legitimately elected Syrian authorities.

We are very concerned that the UNSC and OPCW are constantly receiving data on the preparation of new chemical attacks by Syrian militants. Terrorists have their own technological and production base for the synthesis of full-fledged chemical warfare agents, as well as extensive supply chains for their precursors. There is a risk of recurrence of "chemical terrorism" outside Syria as well. Therefore, it is now extremely important to abandon political ambitions and focus on countering the real threat of "chemical" terrorism.

We firmly reject the unfounded allegations by the United Kingdom of the involvement of Russian citizens in incidents with toxic chemicals in Salisbury and Amesbury. They have only one goal - to mislead the international community. One evidence of this is the refusal of London to cooperate legally with Russia in the "Scripal case". The United Kingdom has yet to present any serious evidence.

At the same time, it is widely known that high-tech chemical laboratories in the West, including in the UK, long before Salisbury, had already conducted research on chemical compounds related to the so-called Novichok agents. In the
United States alone, more than 140 patents have been issued related to the combat use of poisonous substances of this type and protection against them.

We make efforts to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), which should remain a reliable tool to reduce the threat of biological agents being used as weapons and to promote international cooperation in the biological field for peaceful purposes.

We welcome the ratification of the BTWC by Tanzania. We consider this to be the right step towards strengthening biological security both on the African continent and in the world as a whole.

The meeting of experts of the BTWC States Parties was fruitfully concluded in Geneva from 29 July to 9 August this year. Experts from more than 100 States participated. Concrete proposals were considered to improve the implementation of the Convention, including Russian initiatives to establish mobile biomedical units in the format of the Convention to provide assistance in the event of the use of biological weapons, to investigate such use and to combat infectious diseases of various origins, as well as to establish a Scientific Advisory Committee, which will carry out an analysis of the situation in the field of biosafety and, at the request of States Parties, make recommendations on the issue. We are convinced of the timeliness and relevance of these proposals.

We believe that all friends of the BTWC should support in every possible way the intersessional work under way within the framework of the Convention and help to reconcile the positions of delegations in order to accelerate the adoption and implementation of measures that could reduce the threat of biological weapons. There is no real alternative to such a process within the framework of an international treaty to which 183 States are parties. All decisions must be taken on the basis of negotiations among States parties.

Any attempt to impose on States projects developed by someone else in the absence of transparency and inclusiveness is absolutely unacceptable. It is even
more unacceptable to rewrite the provisions of the BTWC in such a key aspect as investigations upon complaint by a State of a violation of the Convention, including possible allegations of the use of biological weapons. We therefore cannot agree with the idea of establishing some kind of "intermediate capacity" in the bowels of the United Nations Secretariat to carry out such "investigations".

Article VI of the BTWC clearly defines the key role of the UN Security Council in initiating and conducting all such investigations - there is simply no other option. Attempts to undermine the BTWC regime in an effort to bring in a sad and reprehensible "experience" of politically motivated chemical weapons investigations in Syria will be doomed to failure. We will not allow the arbitrariness and manipulation in biological sphere that threatens to destroy the OPCW - a successful international organization in the past.

Today, the BTWC regime is put to additional tests due to enhanced military biomedical activities, including in the post-Soviet space. In this regard, we have proposed that the format of the confidence-building measures of the Convention be improved in order to enhance transparency and promote confidence in compliance. As a matter of principle, we call upon those concerned to abandon the militarization of health care.

Thank you for your attention.