Chair, excellencies, distinguished delegates, friends and colleagues,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. This meeting is a turning point. The BWC is where the world convenes to prevent the malign misuse of biotechnology and disease and toxins being used as weapons. The membership of this important international treaty is concluding one intersessional work programme and turning its attention to its next review conference. Providing ways and means, like these statements, for those of us outside government to feed into your work is both valued and valuable.

The issues of inclusivity, capacity building, and sustainability are important to both your current work programme and for your efforts next year.

On inclusivity, Biosecure wishes to celebrate the progress towards a more diverse and welcoming dialogue on disarmament and arms control, including for biological weapons. We wish to congratulate UNIDIR on its workshop “Advancing Gender Perspectives in the Biological Weapons Convention” held this summer. We also recognise the incredible difference that the sponsorship programme run by the ISU has made in geographic diversity. Biosecure agrees with UN Secretary-General Guterres that today’s youth have a critical and transformational role to play in the future direction of disarmament.

Biosecure encourages mainstreaming youth participation in all deliberations through youth quotas in the respective delegations and representation of youth bodies such as young science academies. We also call for qualitative and quantitative standards to ensure diversity across gender, ethnic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds in deliberations and decision-making processes. Youth from the Global South are severely underrepresented due to a lack of awareness and available opportunities, therefore special mechanisms are needed to increase their participation.

On capacity building, Biosecure wishes to reiterate the central role that education of scientists and engineers plays in the work of the BWC. You have reached common understandings on what scientists and engineers need to know, how best this may be accomplished, and who needs to be involved. Despite this clear roadmap, new data appears, and again this year, on how few of our scientists and engineers receive training they need.

Biosecure wishes to highlight our online biosecurity training course, kindly made possible by support from the UK Government. It is completely free and available to all. Designed as an introduction to biosecurity for all those with a stake in preventing the malign misuse of biology, the course includes a wealth of videos and hundreds of supporting materials, quizzes, exercises, and interactive elements. To date, we have trained over 4000 people and received overwhelming positive feedback.

On sustainability, Biosecure notes that for the vast majority of the world it is not possible to have a career in biosecurity. Having aware and engaged scientists and engineers is important but we will need – both inside governments and outside of governments – professionals to work day-in and day-out combating the threat of biological weapons. Until we integrate efforts to deal with deliberate misuse into sustainable oversight regimes for biotechnology writ large, there is a distinct possibility our efforts to be more inclusive and build capacity will simply drain away.

Chair,

Biosecure welcomes the Youth Declaration for Biosecurity, and the side event on youth inclusion in BWC decision-making and global biosecurity. We would like to conclude with a Call to Action for the BWC, UNODA, State Parties and other stakeholders to continue to support initiatives to educate, empower and enable youth to take an active and effective role in biological disarmament.