Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Ambassador Mailu, congratulations on assuming the chairmanship of the meeting. You have waited a long time for this moment, and I would like to thank you for steering the Biological Weapons Convention, or BWC, through a very challenging period. I wish you success in your efforts to reach consensus on a forward-looking and substantive outcome.

Distinguished delegates,

When I last addressed you at the Meeting of States Parties back in 2019, there was little inkling of how our globally-connected world was about to be shaken.

More than one year on, with more than five million deaths, massive societal and economic disruption and with many countries still in the grip of the pandemic, no-one should any longer doubt the huge risks posed by biological threats, whatever their source.

Confronted with such threats, the international community must act. It is the role of the disarmament community to act to prevent the deliberate use of disease as a weapon.
The BWC is the primary tool at our disposal. The Convention has strong normative value as the widely-supported and longstanding codification of the taboo against the use of disease as a weapon.

But we need to go much further. Approaching its fiftieth anniversary in 2025, and particularly on the eve of its Ninth Review Conference next year, I urge all States Parties to use the Review Conference to make serious and substantive improvements to the Convention’s operation.

The experience of the past eighteen months has taught us that “business as usual” is no longer an acceptable option.

What will be required for a successful Review Conference?

First, early and thorough preparations. I hope that you will adopt all the necessary administrative and procedural decisions, particularly those relating to the extension of the mandate of the Implementation Support Unit into next year.

Second, success at the Review Conference will require well-thought out and thoroughly discussed proposals. Fortunately, the current intersessional programme has stimulated several initiatives deserving of serious attention.

The Convention is in urgent need of being revitalized to become a more operational mechanism for preventing the hostile exploitation of the life sciences.

The proposals made are a sign of a Convention that is very much alive. I strongly encourage States Parties to look beyond the Review Conference and find common ground on how the Convention should be functioning on its fiftieth anniversary, and beyond.
Third, the Convention’s clear institutional deficit should be urgently addressed, with additional time and resources devoted to science and technology, international cooperation, assistance, response and preparedness and national implementation. The resources currently allocated to the Convention nationally and internationally come nowhere near to reflecting the seriousness of the risks posed by biological weapons.

Fourth, political will is required. I call on States Parties to devote high-level political attention to the Review Conference next year.

The United Nations is keenly aware of the importance of the BWC and sees the Review Conference as one of several upcoming opportunities to enhance global biological security. I urge you to grasp the opportunity to set the Convention on a new and more ambitious trajectory.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that you reach a successful and worthy conclusion of the intersessional programme, and that you start the preparations for the Review Conference in a positive spirit. Global biosecurity efforts have not had the attention they deserve, but it is my firm belief that we have a collective responsibility to inject a new sense of ambition into the Convention.

I thank you very much for your attention and wish you the best of success.