Thank you, Mr. chairperson,

The Netherlands aligns itself to the statement that will be delivered by the European Union later today.

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown that the international community must tackle biological risks and vulnerabilities. The current crisis emphasizes the importance of the biological and toxin weapons convention in countering biological threats – whether natural or deliberate.

Strengthening the BTWC is a crucial step towards taking on this challenge. To achieve a stronger BTWC, it is imperative that all member states pay their contributions in full and in time. Furthermore, institutional weaknesses should be addressed: the ISU and the intersessional process must be strengthened, and a verification mechanism or enforcement agency must be set up to effectively implement the BTWC. We like to express our full support to the existing mechanism under the UNSGM. Finally, the Convention must be updated to address new biotechnological developments. To this end, the Netherlands cosponsors the German proposal for a Scientific and Technological Experts Advisory Forum. In addition to giving us a better understanding of biotechnological threats, a clear view of developments in science and technology will allow for the timely adoption of measures to combat these threats, such as wastewater surveillance and genetic engineering attribution.

States should also show initiative in improving the ability of the international community to counter biological threats – international cooperation and assistance are crucial in this area. Initiative must be shown in areas such as the Confidence-Building Measures, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building. In particular, the Netherlands has had good experiences with voluntary peer reviews, which it has carried out since 2015 in cooperation with its BeNeLux partners, France, Germany, Morocco, and Georgia. Hopefully, this will encourage other states to take initiative in this area and conduct peer reviews with both traditional partners and other states.

In addition to peer reviews, the Netherlands supports various initiatives that improve worldwide biosafety and biosecurity. The Netherlands actively contributes to the Global Partnership and its Biosecurity Working Group. Last year, the Biosecurity Working Group launched the Signature Initiative, which aims to improve biosecurity implementation in cooperation with Global Partnership partners and African parties such as the Africa CDC and African Union. To this end, the Netherlands partakes in two working groups: WG1 on biosafety and biosecurity and WG3 on disease surveillance and epidemic intelligence. The Netherlands participates in the German RefBio project, which strengthens bio-analytical reference laboratories designated for the UNSGM. This year, the Netherlands has been elected as the Co-Chair of the steering committee of the International Experts Groups of Biosafety and Biosecurity Regulators. This group consists of biosafety and biosecurity regulatory authorities from 11 countries with strong oversight systems in place. Finally, the Netherlands plays an active role in the Global Health and Security Agenda.
My delegation would like to reiterate its commitment to advancing gender equality, women’s empowerment, diversity and inclusion in international peace & security and disarmament affairs. The Netherlands will continue to strengthen the link with the other gender equality agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the Generation Equality Forums. We look forward to continuing our discussion on enhancing gender equality.

Finally, we urge all States Parties of the BTWC to not let initiatives, technical proposals and new solutions that could strengthen the Convention be bogged down in politicized discussions. Let’s all maintain an open stance and facilitate a fruitful discussion during this upcoming Meeting of States Parties and during the Ninth Review Conference in 2022. Let us not forget that we all have the same goal: preventing a similar, destructive pandemic like Covid-19 from occurring in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair