Mr Chair,

Let me first congratulate you on your appointment to this important office, after so many months of preparation. Let me also thank the Secretariat and our Implementation Support Unit for their invaluable work.

The UK remains committed to ensuring that the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention upholds the global prohibition against biological weapons. As the BTWC nears the 50th year since it opened for signature, the UK is determined to ensure that we all live in a world free from the threat of biological weapons.

The challenges and risks are clear. We have seen the harm done by COVID-19 to our peoples, economies and societies. Our task is to draw the right conclusions; to be ready to take the right action to prevent and fight infectious disease whether natural, accidental or deliberate in origin. We all have a shared interest in ensuring that the BTWC is strong, effective and global.

In March 2021 the UK Government published its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. The Review highlighted the risk of terrorist groups attacking with biological, chemical or radiological threats. Nor can we ignore the possibility that some states continue to develop biological agents for non-peaceful purposes.

The rapid advances in science and technology we have seen over the past few years will offer great benefits in terms of peaceful research, but also threats from those who wish to use biological means to attack others. We must be vigilant. We must keep pace.
The UK is playing its part. In 2021, as the Presidency of the G7 Global Partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction, with partners, we established the Signature Initiative to Mitigate Deliberate Biological Threats in Africa. We continue to support adherence to the Convention, including by providing £125,000 for UNODA to support CARICOM States Parties to meet their legislative and CBM obligations under this Convention. Full and effective national implementation is essential for ensuring the BTWC achieves genuine universality.

The UK is taking practical steps under Article X, including by leading international responses to tackle biological risks to global public health. Over one billion doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine have been administered through the COVAX programme. This is a vaccine developed in the UK, sold at no profit. At last year’s UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit, we underlined the need for equitable access to vaccines for all through partnerships and licensing agreements.

At the Meetings of Experts this year, we delivered presentations and working papers on: the scope and definition of cooperation and assistance under Article X at MX1; on biorisk assessment and management in MX2; and decision-making and future institutional strengthening at MX5. Agile and effective decision-making will be essential for this Convention to keep pace with emerging threats and to remain relevant in the fight against biological weapons.

We must reflect on the wealth of information presented to the MXs. We thank the MX Chairs for their informative summaries; and those who contributed to the helpful exchanges of views on how to strengthen the Convention.

Building on that, the 9th Review Conference is an opportunity to look forward. The UK calls upon all States Parties for action, ambition and cooperation. Let us make 2022 a breakthrough year for the BTWC. There is common ground. We all want to avoid the re-emergence of biological weapons. We all want a successful outcome at the Review Conference.

Let us start with the basics. Too many countries fail to pay their contributions. While the financial situation has improved in recent years, it remains fragile. The fragility of the BTWC’s financial situation is the result of consistent non-payment of assessed contributions by some States Parties. Ahead of the 50th anniversary, let us make this right.

For the substance, there are areas on which we see consensus emerging. An ambitious intersessional programme will demonstrate our intent to tackle the challenges. Strengthening the Implementation Support Unit will show that we share a common goal to improve the work of the Convention. Calls to emphasize gender perspectives in the BTWC have rightly been welcomed by many States Parties.
There are substantive steps we can take together to strengthen the BTWC as an institution. We can make more progress on proposals for guiding principles for a code of conduct for biological scientists and the need for a structured science and technology review process.

Mr Chair,

We are determined to strengthen the BTWC at the 9th Review Conference. With public concern over biological threats greater than ever, we should all consider carefully what we can achieve jointly over the next 12 months and beyond. Past differences need not frustrate us further. This Meeting of States Parties is a milestone to an important year for the Convention. We look forward to productive discussions.

Thank you.

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