Mister Vice Chair:

1. I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

2. We commend the Vice Chairs and the Implementation Support Unit for their excellent stewardship of the Convention. We express our full support and cooperation in ensuring productive discussions at this meeting towards a successful 9th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention.

3. The ASEAN Blueprint for 2025 ASEAN Political Security Community gives importance to the issue of CBRN in the context of efforts to enhance ASEAN’s capacity to address non-traditional security issues, particularly transnational crimes and terrorism. ASEAN cooperated on CBRN matters under the Hanoi Plan of Action to Implement ASEAN Regional Forum Vision Statement in the Areas of Counterterrorism-Transnational Crime as well as the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership that promotes cooperation in mitigating risks associated with CBRN materials.

4. With regard to the BWC, the ASEAN Member States, through the ASEAN Regional Forum and in coordination with other States, continue to conduct
workshops focusing on bio-threat reduction, bio-risk management, disease surveillance, detection, preparedness, and response.

5. Last week, CBRN experts from ASEAN Member States participated in regional capacity building workshops organized by the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs in Geneva, with support from Japan. The first workshop, held on 29-30 March, focused on strengthening national, sub-regional, and international capacities to prepare for and respond to the deliberate use of biological weapons, including sharing transferable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for BWC, as well as advancing gender equality within the BWC and potential implications with respect to Article VII of the Convention. It also addressed efforts to strengthen the capacity of BWC National Contact Points in Southeast Asia, including the preparation of Confidence-Building Measures (CBM). The second workshop, held on 31 March, informed participants about the mandate and background of the U.N. Secretary-General’s Mechanism (UNSGM). It provided information about the roles and responsibilities of Qualified Experts, Expert Consultants, and Analytical Laboratories on the UNSGM roster, as well as an overview of existing training programmes and cooperation with other international partners engaged in UNSGM capacity-building activities.

6. These two workshops built upon the first and second BWC regional workshop for ASEAN Member States on “Strengthening National, Sub-Regional and International Capacities to Prepare for and Respond to the Deliberate Use of Biological Weapons,” which were held in Thailand and Malaysia, respectively, in 2019.

7. On 13-15 June, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Tabletop Exercise on Response Capabilities to CBRN Incidents will be held in Manila, to be co-chaired by the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and the U.S.. This tabletop exercise aims to enhance inter-operability and coordination among concerned government agencies and the international community on how to deal with a biological incident; identify best practices, opportunities and gaps in the region’s response capabilities, test national and regional action and response plans with the view towards constant improvement and updating; develop recommendations on how to improve regional response mechanisms in the event of a biological incident; and
identify priority actions to strengthen national capacities in CBRN risk mitigation and response.

8. This tabletop exercise builds upon previous ARF events, such as the ARF Bio-Preparedness Table-Top Exercise and Workshop in 2015 and the ARF Workshops on “Raising Awareness and Promoting Cooperation on CBRN Risk Mitigation” in 2015 and 2018.

9. The CBRN Center of Excellence network established a regional secretariat for Southeast Asia in Manila in 2013 to enhance the capacity of ASEAN Member States in mitigating CBRN-related risks. This was an initiative of the E.U. and jointly implemented by the European Commission Joint Research Center and the U.N. Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). This Manila-based regional secretariat ensures cooperation and coordination in Southeast Asia and supports efforts to identify CBRN risk mitigation needs, develop National CBRN Action Plans, and formulate and implement regional project proposals.

Mister Vice Chair:

10. ASEAN takes note of the spirit embodied in the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1540, which affirms the need to address the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and their means of delivery. ASEAN continues to call for the implementation of principles stipulated by UNSCR 1540.

11. We stress the need to ensure that the Convention remain up-to-date, answers the needs of the time, conducive to enhance assistance, capacity-building, and provision of technology as well as unearmarked funding to developing countries, upon their request, and for States in a position to do so to render technical or financial assistance to requesting States, as appropriate.

12. We recognize the importance of Confidence-Building Measures provided by States in order to build transparency.
13. We also recognize the necessity of multilateral negotiations and note the lack of verification measure, the latter of which poses a challenge to the effectiveness of the Convention.

14. ASEAN believes in promoting and achieving universality of this Convention in order to move forward in the field of disarmament. We therefore encourage all States to join and accede to the BWC.

15. On the implementation of Article X, ASEAN places great importance in enhancing international cooperation, assistance and exchanges in toxins, biological agents equipment and technology for peaceful purposes. These include production of drugs, medicines, and vaccines life-saving achievements especially for developing countries.

16. In conclusion, we reiterate our full support and cooperation in making this Review Conference successful.

Thank you, Mister Vice Chair.