Mister Vice Chair,

Strengthening international response capabilities for infectious disease outbreaks, whether natural or deliberate in origin, begins with the building of strong national capacities. These should then be coupled with the institutionalization of mechanisms that will allow these individual capacities to be applied swiftly, effectively, and in a coordinated manner during a crisis.

Like many States Parties, the Philippines has benefitted from international expertise, best practices and technical assistance to strengthen our own domestic capacities, including most recently with the CBRN National Action Plan in October 2019.

Our experience testifies to the importance of sustaining and strengthening bilateral, regional, and international partnerships to implement Article VII, and we continue to work with like-minded partners in our region on strengthening international response capabilities for infectious disease outbreaks, whether natural or deliberate in origin.

The pandemic has tested the preparedness of national, regional and global institutions in responding to biological threats. In our experience, the exploration of
the non-traditional functions of our key CBRN agencies proved useful in responding to the public health emergency.

We welcome the efforts by India and France to advance our consideration of the development of an Article VII database, and by South Africa to explore possible voluntary guidelines for states requesting assistance. We hope to see decisions on these points at the RevCon.

The RevCon should also seek to recognize and stimulate the synergies of the existing regional and global platforms that promote engagement, exchange, and capacity-building between and among States Parties, regional and multilateral organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

We see the importance of pursuing work on Article VII within regional cooperation mechanisms. In Southeast Asia, the priority attached to preparedness and coordinated response to CBRN-related threats are enshrined in high-level guiding documents and plans of action of ASEAN and are implemented through a wide range of activities regularly undertaken by ASEAN Member States.

Preparations are now underway for the table-top exercise that the Philippines is co-chairing with the Republic of Korea and the United States within the ambit of the ASEAN Regional Forum’s intersessional workstream on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. This table-top exercise that will be held in June this year will focus on biological proliferation scenario with a possible two-stage process: the first stage will test national capacities, and the second will simulate international response.

We are also grateful to the European Union for its support for the CBRN Center for Excellence in Southeast Asia, which we are proud to host in Manila. The network of this EU-supported centers has flourished, emphasizing the clear link between Article VII and strengthened measures for international cooperation and assistance, especially in building the surveillance, detection, and response capabilities of developing States.

Finally, we would like to recall that at the 7th and 8th Review Conferences recognized that "there are differences among States Parties in terms of their level of development, national capabilities and resources, and that these differences affect national and international capacity to respond effectively to an alleged use of a biological or toxin weapons". Related to this, we hope that the 9th Review Conference will confirm and uphold the clear agreement reached at the 8th RevCon that national preparedness should not be imposed as a precondition for either provision or receipt or assistance.

I thank you, Mister Vice Chair.