

**Statement by Ambassador Robert A. Wood
Delegation of the United States of America**

**71st UNGA First Committee
Thematic Discussion on Other Weapons of Mass Destruction**

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Mr. Chairman, colleagues,

At the heart of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a solemn conviction: for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons through the implementation of the Convention. This commitment is coupled with the equally important pledge not to tolerate possession and use of such heinous weapons, be it by State or Non-State Actors. Use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere is a threat to all of us, and calls for a swift response. Inaction is unacceptable.

In August of 2013, the Asad regime in Syria launched a deadly chemical weapons attack with a nerve agent on the opposition-held suburbs of Damascus, killing over 1,000 people and injuring thousands more. Despite the overwhelming evidence of its continued use of chemical weapons, the regime continues to deny any involvement. Since its accession to the CWC following that horrific attack three years ago, the international community has collectively sought a full and accurate declaration by Syria of its chemical weapons program and its complete and verifiable destruction.

This past August, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) -United Nations (UN) Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), established by UNSCR 2235, released its report finding that the Syrian military was responsible for two instances of confirmed CW use in Syria and that the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” or ISIL was responsible for one additional instance. The attacks attributed to the Syrian military involved barrel bombs dropped from helicopters that released toxic substances – most likely chlorine – in the opposition-controlled areas of Talmenes and Sarmin. The OPCW-UN JIM, an independent and expert international body, has drawn the same conclusions that the United States reached long ago: that the Syrian regime has systematically and repeatedly used chemical weapons against its people. It is now impossible to deny that the Syrian regime has repeatedly used toxic industrial chemicals as weapons in violation of the CWC and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

Mr. Chairman, our course of action is clear. The international community must stand together to preserve the integrity and viability of the CWC and the international laws, norms, and standards against the use of chemical weapons. We must collectively condemn in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and ISIL and hold the perpetrators of such heinous attacks to account through all available mechanisms, including appropriate action in the OPCW and the United Nations Security Council. In parallel, we must insist that the Syrian regime address outstanding concerns about its chemical weapons declaration, which the OPCW has attempted for more than two long years to clarify without success due to the intransigence of the Syrian regime.

Mr. Chairman, Hungarian Ambassador Molnar, the distinguished President-designate of the upcoming 8th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), presented a Statement on behalf of the Foreign Minister of Hungary, and the Foreign Ministers of the three BWC Depositaries, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and my country, the United States. That statement underscores the importance our governments attach to the BWC and to taking decisions at the upcoming Review Conference to enhance its effectiveness.

The BWC Review Conference takes place at a sobering time. The continuing use of chemical weapons, the stated intentions of non-state actors to obtain BW, and a recent conviction (July 2015) in the UK of an individual attempting to acquire ricin are grim reminders that weapons already condemned by the international community are still used. The many benefits derived from advances in the life sciences also place biological weapon capabilities within reach of more State and non-State actors than ever before. The recent Ebola outbreak reminds us of how destructive disease can be, and of the importance of developing national and international capacity to detect and respond to outbreaks. States Parties should use the upcoming BWC Review Conference to confront these threats by taking stronger action, including through a more effective intersessional program, focusing on practical steps. The United States believes such steps should be taken in the areas of: robust national implementation measures and greater transparency; coordination among States Parties to respond to a suspicious outbreak or biological weapons attack; assessing potential impact on the BWC due to science and technology developments; and promoting and coordinating relevant international cooperation and capacity-building.

Strengthening the BWC in these areas depends on adapting the current intersessional process to include more focused expert work, more oversight of the process, and an ability for appropriate decision-making between Review

Conferences. This would require more time and resources, but these extra resources would improve the BWC's ability to counter biological threats.

Mr. Chairman, the United States shares the concerns that have been expressed by other UN Member States regarding the threat of chemical and biological terrorism. These threats are real, and the United States is of the firm view that they should be addressed in the context of the existing international frameworks and the BWC Review Conference in November presents an opportunity to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.