Mr Chair, Distinguished Representatives:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I speak to you on behalf of 45 individuals and institutions.

The global norm against biological weapons is a foundational element of international peace and security. Recognising the importance of universality of our Convention, we warmly welcome Tanzania’s ratification of the BWC in August this year, and the continued efforts by the Chair, individual States Parties and civil society colleagues to achieve universalisation. National implementation of the Convention and supporting review conference recommendations remains crucial to sustaining the norm against biological weapons, and we encourage all States Parties to continue in their efforts to strengthen their national implementing measures.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the adoption, without a vote, of the BWC Resolution in the UN General Assembly First Committee. Unlike the Resolution on the Chemical Weapons Convention, where several highly politicised elements have hampered consensus, the BWC resolution continues to achieve unanimous support, reflecting the international community’s continued support for the norm against biological weapons and support for the Convention. Yet, there are some States Parties that take away valuable time from BWC meetings, for example, by making highly political statements that would be more appropriately addressed in other forums, by making accusations of misconduct without providing evidence, or by using procedural declarations to derail good faith progress on the aims of the Convention. We encourage all States Parties to keep the meetings focused on the tasks at hand, and to work together to advance the objectives of the BWC.

We also welcome the growing interest in the topic of ‘gender and disarmament’ within the BWC community. We are pleased that the BWC Resolution in First Committee includes gender language for the first time—encouraging the equitable participation of women and men. This is important. As is the recognition of gendered impacts of biological weapons. A more robust reflection of the gendered norms associated with weapons, war and violence is also crucial for effectively addressing the challenges associated with the proliferation and use of weapons in and out of conflict. We encourage delegates to investigate how persisting gender stereotypes pose obstacles to non-proliferation and disarmament.

Mr Chair,

The Meetings of Experts convened this past summer saw very constructive and substantive discussions. Delegations were very willing to engage in interactive discussion and debate, as
they had done at the 2018 Meetings of Experts. Hence it was highly regrettable that these discussions were not reflected in a substantial outcome document from last year’s MSP. This unfortunate outcome is not reflective of the considerable preparations and substantial discussions that took place, nor of the wishes of the vast majority of States Parties. We strongly urge all States Parties to consider ways to ensure a substantive document is agreed at this meeting. Looking ahead to the 2021 Review Conference, we urge all States Parties to agree to provide inter-sessional meetings with the authority to take substantive decisions without having to wait for the five-year cycle of review conferences.

Advances in biological sciences and biotechnology capabilities have long challenged the BWC. The civil society community has considerable technical knowledge and expertise regarding emerging S&T capabilities, and we stand ready to support all efforts to strengthen the BWC, including assisting States Parties in identifying and leveraging emerging technologies and mitigating potential associated risks.¹ These efforts include oversight and governance mechanisms, codes of conduct, active learning systems to engage scientists in their development of risk assessments and the responsible use of science, and formal positions within or in support of the ISU, such as a Scientific Advisory Mechanism or S&T Officer. We recognise States Parties’ dedicated efforts in reviewing S&T and encourage continued discussions, including during the 2022-25 inter-sessional meetings, to better identify and understand emerging technologies and implementation mechanisms that will allow the BWC to adapt and evolve to address future capabilities and threats.

As we noted in our statement last year, and we are concerned that we will need to say again next year, there is still no agreement on how to operationalise Article VII. We are encouraged, however, by the interest amongst States Parties in Article VII, as well as the meetings, exercises and workshops that have taken place over the past year here in Geneva and around the world, that have focused on responses to, and investigations into, potential deliberate events. We strongly encourage States Parties to continue to strive towards operationalizing Article VII. The civil society community remains committed to supporting States Parties in these efforts. To that end, we are pleased to announce that for the first year, civil society is providing a catalogue of activities in support of Article X and States Parties to the BWC, which we hope to be integrated into the Article X database.

Mr Chair,

The financial situation of the BWC remains critical. We welcome the measures endorsed at last year’s MSP to encourage timely payment, ensure liquidity and avoid deficit spending or accumulation of liabilities. We are encouraged by contributions to the recently established Working Capital Fund, and we gratefully acknowledge and congratulate the contributing States Parties for their leadership. However, the financial situation remains precarious, compromising the progress of work and the credibility of the Convention. We urge States Parties to continue their efforts to secure the financial predictability and sustainability of future BWC meetings and of the ISU.

Finally, Mr Chair, we welcome your recognition that the voices, perspectives and experiences of civil society provide important contributions to BWC discussions. Civil society has played an increasingly important role in recent years in efforts to strengthen the Convention. We strongly encourage all States Parties to continue to support, and engage closely with, civil society to achieve this mutually sought goal.

**Statement prepared and endorsed by:**

Georgetown University Center for Global Health Science and Security, USA  
Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, USA  
Brett Edwards, University of Bath, United Kingdom  
Nicholas Evans, University of Massachusetts Lowell, USA  
Marc Finaud, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), Switzerland  
Katrin Geyer, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)  
Mirko Himmel, University of Hamburg, Germany  
Uriel L. Lemus, Center for Biodefense and Global Infectious Diseases, Mexico  
Filippa Lentzos, King’s College London, United Kingdom  
Robert Mathews, University of Melbourne, Australia  
Kathryn Millett, Biosecure, United Kingdom  
Tatyana Novossiolova, Center for the Study of Democracy, Bulgaria  
Saskia Popescu, George Mason University, USA

**Statement further endorsed by:**

*Institutional endorsers:*

Biosafety Association for Central Asia and Caucasus (BACAC)  
Biosecure Ltd, United Kingdom  
Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation (CACNP), USA  
Center for Global Health Security and Diplomacy, Canada  
Disarmament Dynamics, United Kingdom  
Foundation for the Development of Biotechnology and Genetics (POLBIOGEN), Poland  
International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA)  
International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES)  
Landau Network, Fondazione Alessandro Volta, Italy  
Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)  
Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland  
The Trench, France  
Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), United Kingdom  
Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security and Conflict Transformation, USA  
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

*Individual endorsers:*

Richard T. Cupitt, Stimson Center, USA  
Malcolm Dando, University of Bradford, United Kingdom
Richard Guthrie, CBW Events, United Kingdom
Alastair Hay, University of Leeds, United Kingdom
Martin Hugh-Jones, Louisiana State University, USA
Ernst-Juergen Finke, Germany
Lynn C. Klotz, Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation, USA
Gregory D. Koblentz, George Mason University, USA
Jenifer Mackby, Federation of American Scientists, USA
Maurizio Martellini, Landau Network, Fondazione Alessandro Volta, Italy
Kathryn Nixdorff, Darmstadt University of Technology, Germany
Megan J. Palmer, Stanford University, USA
Alexandra Phelan, Georgetown University Center for Global Health Science and Security, USA
Nicholas Sims, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), United Kingdom
Ryszard Slomski, Institute of Human Genetics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland
Marlena Szelata, Poznan University of Life Sciences, Poland
Ralf Trapp, France

**Statement delivered by:**

Robert Mathews, University of Melbourne, Australia