Mr Chair

Please accept my delegation’s well wishes. Be assured you can rely on Aotearoa New Zealand’s support in your important task as Chair of this Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention.

My delegation views this review meeting as a crucial opportunity to confirm the importance of the international taboo against poisoning and deliberate spreading of disease. Fifty years ago the BWC outlawed biological weapons in all their forms, and these prohibitions remain as relevant and crucial as ever today.

Since the Convention’s last Review Conference in 2016 the world has experienced a pandemic that only underlined why the international community needs multilateral approaches to common problems. Pathogens and toxins do not care about our political differences. We must therefore stand against them together. If we fail to come together, each of our societies stands to suffer. That is why, alongside global public health efforts, New Zealand supports meaningful initiatives to strengthen the BWC.

This year saw one BWC state party use the Convention’s Article V and Article VI mechanisms as a vehicle for ill-founded allegations of non-compliance by other states parties. Like others, New Zealand is gravely concerned about Russia’s motivations for invoking these mechanisms. Following as they do Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, it is hard to see them as much more than baseless rationalisations from our point of view. Nevertheless, those BWC processes have run their course, and it is now time to move on.
Mr Chair, New Zealand believes we are at an important inflection point in the life of the biological disarmament regime. After twenty years of cautious yet substantial discussion and mutual confidence-building at expert level in the BWC, a choice is opening up before us. We should seize the opportunity to focus on feasible alternatives for enhancing confidence in compliance with the Convention, as well as enhancing international cooperation and assistance and its institutional structure.

It is why New Zealand has co-sponsored a proposal contained in Working Paper 2 (BWC/CONF.IX/WP.2), along with at least 16 other state parties, to establish a temporary experts working group. We hope all states parties will study the proposal and encourage you to support it. Such a mechanism would provide us a platform on which to explore the gamut of substantive proposals we have before us in detail, enabling us to both understand them better and choose those that best meet the needs and realities of the Convention.

New Zealand is also in favour of a fit-for-purpose database for the Convention and a process to review scientific and technological developments as two other worthy priorities.

Related to this, my delegation also notes with appreciation the large body of work produced by UNIDIR over the last few years involving many experts in domains related to the BWC. These resources can help inform us about the issues and some of the options.

In closing, Mr Chair, my delegation also wishes to commend the work of the BWC’s Implementation Support Unit, which is an invaluable asset to the functioning of the Convention. New Zealand is in favour of efforts to strengthen the ISU as a component of enhancing the BWC’s overall capacity, and to this end stress the need for the ISU’s continued financial viability, in which all states parties owe a stake.

The biological disarmament regime is a collective endeavour, and we should work towards achieving it in an inclusive way. Aotearoa New Zealand encourages all efforts by the ISU to attract the best talent from all backgrounds by mainstreaming gender and diversity considerations into its personnel policies.

I thank you.