Mr Chairman

The proliferation of chemical and biological weapons is a potentially serious threat to global and regional security.

Australia has long stood at the forefront of efforts to counter this threat.

In 1985, Australia convened the first meeting of 15 nations in Brussels in response to Iraq’s use of chemical weapons in its war with Iran.

The 15 participants sought to prevent Iraq from acquiring materials to build chemical weapons through otherwise legitimate commercial trade.

Their response – harmonised national export controls – led to the Australia Group’s birth.

Since then, the international community has strengthened its efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons once and for all.

The Chemical Weapons Convention marked its tenth anniversary earlier this year.

In the past decade, the Convention has emerged as a vital cornerstone of the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

Its significance is reflected in its aims – the total and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons.

It is regrettable that progress towards this goal is proceeding more slowly than anticipated.

And that some states continue to remain outside the Convention.

Australia urges possessor states to continue to work assiduously toward meeting their agreed destruction timelines, and for states remaining outside the Convention to accede to and implement the Convention without delay.

Mr Chairman

A critical factor in the strength of the CWC is the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The OPCW has ensured the effective operation of the CWC’s verification regime, an essential tool for ensuring full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Moreover, the OPCW has facilitated international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry.
And under its watch, the Convention has made progress toward its disarmament purpose through the destruction of 23,912 tonnes of chemical weapon agent.

On the tenth anniversary of the OPCW, we acknowledge the efforts and dedication of the OPCW Directors-General and its Technical Secretariat.

Mr Chairman

In parallel with the CWC, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is strengthening global defences against biological weapons and bio-terrorism.

Australia welcomes the agreement at the last BWC Review Conference to measures that will promote the Treaty’s universalisation and ensure its full and effective implementation.

These measures help to strengthen the BWC’s role in international security, and in turn assist states to meet their obligations to counter bio-terrorism under UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

Under the action plan for the universalisation of the Convention that was agreed at the Review Conference, Australia has undertaken several initiatives, including at Ministerial level, to promote accession to the Convention in the Asia-Pacific.

Effective national implementation has also been a focus of Australia’s promotion of the Convention and its aims in the Asia-Pacific region. This year Australia provided biosafety and biosecurity training for regional experts, which covered issues that included national legislation, enhanced security of pathogens and toxins, bio-defence and surveillance, codes of conduct for scientists and the role of the BWC against bio-terrorism.

In addition, Australia welcomes the creation of the BWC Implementation Support Unit, and the cycle of intersessional meetings, as endorsed at the Review Conference. The BWC ISU is already playing a critical role in promoting national implementation and universalisation, as well as facilitating the coordination of other international activities which strengthen the Convention.

Australia also values the intersessional meetings of experts and States Parties, which help keep the international community focused on issues covered by the BWC, and abreast of relevant advances in the life sciences.

Finally, we take the opportunity of this thematic debate to call on states not party to the BWC to accede to it without delay.

I thank you.