Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I would like to join those who have extended their thanks and commendations to the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Pfirter, for his outstanding service, which has so notably advanced the cause of the global elimination of chemical weapons. We are deeply appreciative of his efforts. I would also warmly welcome the countries that have joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in the last year: Lebanon, Iraq, the Bahamas.

The steady entry of new States Parties over the last several years, bringing the CWC close to universal membership (there are currently 188 States Parties), has been most encouraging. We strongly support the efforts of all States Parties, the Director General, and the Technical Secretariat to strengthen contacts with the remaining non-member states.

This morning the OPCW Executive Council agreed by consensus to recommend Ambassador Ahmet Uzumcu of Turkey to be the next Director-General of the Organization. We congratulate Ambassador Uzumcu and look forward to his appointment by the Conference of States Parties later this year. The United States would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate India and one other State Party for completing their chemical weapons stockpile destruction programs over the past year. Let me also note that technology and the chemical industry continue to advance and evolve. It is essential – as recognized by 2nd Review Conference – that verification under the CWC continues to adapt to keep pace with these changes.

Earlier this afternoon, the Director General noted the extensive effort of the United States to complete the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles.

The United States is proud of the success of its destruction program, which has destroyed over 60% of our chemical weapons, including 100% of binary weapons (which were our most modern and advanced chemical weapons), 100% of our former chemical weapons production facilities, and over 96% of all nerve agent.

I would like to stress that the U.S. is fully committed to verified destruction of 100% of its chemical weapons stockpile as rapidly as possible. We are equally committed to transparency and to proactive full disclosure of our destruction activities.

Mr. Chairman, let me now turn to Biological Weapons.

When she addressed the First Committee last week, Under Secretary Ellen Tauscher stated that the United States is “fully committed to the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions.” I cannot improve on that clear statement of U.S. policy, but perhaps I can elaborate slightly.
The Obama Administration takes the biological weapons threat very seriously, and strongly supports the Biological Weapons Convention as a vital means of addressing this threat – regardless of whether it comes from states or non-state actors.

The BWC Meeting of Experts, this past August, under the skilled leadership of its Chairman, illustrates both the value of the BWC as a forum and the seriousness with which we approach it. These discussions addressed important, real-world, issues related to developing international disease surveillance and response capabilities that are essential to dealing with the threat of infectious disease, whether natural or deliberate in nature, and the United States brought some of our most senior experts to the table to discuss these issues.

The United States has taken a number of measures to assist and partner with other nations in building disease surveillance and response capabilities, as have other states. We welcome their efforts, and underscore the usefulness of the August meeting in exchanging information about current activities, areas of need, and opportunities for collaboration among BWC States Parties and within the broader health security community.

We believe that the interconnection between public health and international security is increasingly clear to all, and will be an important focus of future work in the BWC arena. At the same time, BWC States Parties will need to work together pragmatically to find ways to address the evolution of the BW threat, which increasingly comes from non-state actors as well as governments; to find ways to promote greater transparency; and to promote effective implementation of BWC obligations at the national level by all States Parties.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the United States will continue to work with other States Parties in using the BWC as a constructive forum to advance the security of all nations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman