Mr. Chairman,

A year ago in this forum, as reports of chemical weapons use in Syria were prompting increasing concerns, the United States emphasized the very real possibility that the world may be faced with a situation where the use of chemical weapons could become a reality. With the confirmation of the senseless killing, on August 21, of over 1000 Syrians including hundreds of young children by the use of chemical weapons, the world saw that horrible reality come true. The United States and the international community quickly and unconditionally condemned such actions. We continue to stand firm on such use as reprehensible; it goes against what has been an international norm for nearly a century. The use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

It remains our overarching goal, and that of 98% of the world community, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. However, the United States believes that such a commitment should be reflected in deeds and not just words, which is why the United States was prepared to take the action that led to the historic U.S.-Russia Framework and subsequently the adoption on September 27th of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council Decision and UN Security Council Resolution 2118, that imposes legally binding obligations on Syria to cooperate fully in the rapid elimination of its chemical weapons program under stringent verification procedures.

The fact that just a month ago the Syrian regime did not even acknowledge it possessed chemical weapons, and now inspectors are not only on the ground but they are overseeing the initial stages of destruction, is a step forward. UN Security Council Resolution 2118 requires that the Syrian Government provide the OPCW, the UN and designated personnel with immediate and unfettered access to any and all sites in Syria. Such access will be critical for the elimination of the Syrian CW program. The OPCW reports that the process of destroying Syria’s chemical weapons program began on October 6. We believe that the OPCW, UN and other
designated personnel on the ground will see whether the Syrians are prepared to allow this kind of access and consent to efforts to move forward rapidly and comprehensively. It is now up to the Syrian Government and there is clearly more work to be done. The international community will be paying close attention to whether the Syrian regime is abiding by all of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, OPCW Executive Council decision and UNSCR 2118.

In this regard, we welcome and strongly support the successful efforts of the Director General of the OPCW, Ahmet Uzumcu, and the extraordinary work being done by him and the experts in the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW for its long-standing efforts to eliminate chemical weapons is further validation of its commitment and resolve toward eliminating an entire class of WMD. The OPCW has been instrumental in verifying the elimination of chemical weapons around the world and is dedicated to the vision of a world free of chemical weapons and the prevention of the reemergence of such weapons.

It is also equally important to recognize UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and his staff of professionals who are partnering with the OPCW in the important work going on in Syria. We acknowledge the bravery and professionalism of the staffs that make up the OPCW-UN teams and the important mission they have undertaken despite the dangers involved. Their efforts are to be commended and remembered.

Mr. Chairman,

On other CWC related matters, the OPCW held its Third CWC Review Conference (RevCon) in April of this year. Its final document provides a strong, balanced, and forward-looking call for continued and improved implementation of the Convention. It provides guidance on chemical weapons for the next five years and focuses on CW destruction, verification, chemical industry, economic cooperation, and preserving the expertise of the Technical Secretariat.

I would like to emphasize that the United States remains encouraged by the progress made by the OPCW in working toward a world free of chemical weapons. Since entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the OPCW has accomplished a great deal and remains an indispensable multilateral body with a global responsibility. With a near universal membership of 190 member states, with Somalia and Syria joining this year, over 81% of all declared chemical weapon stockpiles verifiably destroyed, and over 5,200 inspections conducted at
military and industry sites since entry into force, we are certainly pleased with what the OPCW has accomplished. This progress is due to the combined efforts and commitment of States Parties, along with the OPCW’s Technical Secretariat.

For our part, the United States has safely destroyed nearly 90 percent of its chemical weapons stockpile under OPCW verification. The United States continues its steadfast commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention and will continue working in a transparent manner towards the complete destruction of our remaining amount of chemical weapons.

The United States remains fully committed to the non-proliferation of chemical weapons. Such a goal will take commitment from all States Parties and a continued effort in a number of areas to include universality. We recognize that preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons requires a strong inspectorate, a credible industrial verification regime, and enactment by all States Parties of the necessary domestic legal regimes to fully enforce the CWC. These are all areas of vital importance for the success and longevity of the CWC and the Organization responsible for its implementation. In the preamble of the Chemical Weapons Convention, all States Parties “determined for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons through the implementation of the provisions of this Convention.” We must stand together to make this goal a reality.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States, as one of the depositaries of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), would like to congratulate Cameroon, Guyana, Malawi, the Marshall Islands, and Nauru for becoming States Parties to the Convention since the last meeting of this Committee. The BWC now has 170 States Parties, and we urge all to make efforts toward the universality of this important treaty.

The Seventh BWC Review Conference (RevCon) in 2011 was an opportunity for greater imagination and collective effort in confronting the threat of biological weapons, and for continuing the important work of adapting our international efforts to a changing world and a changing threat. While the RevCon did not achieve everything the United States hoped it would, we were satisfied with the outcome, and believe the stage is set for enhancing the important work of the BWC Intersessional Process.
The RevCon adopted a five-year work plan with agenda items for 2012-2013 on international cooperation and assistance, developments in science and technology (S&T), strengthening national implementation, and Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). Since then, we have made progress on the work plan, both at the December 2012 BWC Meeting of States Parties, which produced a constructive final report, and at the August 2013 Meeting of Experts, which held useful discussions on many details of these agenda items in a positive atmosphere.

Mr. Chairman,

Discussions and briefings at these two meetings on international cooperation and assistance have demonstrated the diversity and extensiveness of ongoing global exchanges in the life sciences, including in areas of particular importance to the Convention such as biosecurity. With regard to S&T, Parties acknowledged that the rapid pace of technological change presents both challenges and opportunities for the BWC. An important focus was the challenge presented by dual-use research of concern and the utility of voluntary codes of conduct, education and awareness-raising for addressing it.

States Parties also continued to share information on the status of national implementation of the Convention and on the assistance available for effectively implementing it, and considered ways in which they could promote confidence in their compliance through transparency about implementation. Finally, a range of proposals to enhance the value of CBMs to States Parties were discussed, though it is still unclear why many Parties do not submit CBMs and what challenges they face in making use of them. More broadly, the 2013 BWC meetings reflected the link of the Convention to global health security, emphasizing the need to strengthen adherence to international norms, such as the International Health Regulations, and the value of working with international organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health. The United States recognizes that the unique nature of the biological threat makes it essential to accelerate progress to achieve global health security, including international capacity to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease threats whether the result of a naturally occurring outbreak, accidental release or intentional event.

We look forward to reaching clear understandings and pragmatic, meaningful actions to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention in each of these areas and demonstrate the value of effective multilateralism at the BWC Meeting of States Parties in December. It is also important for Parties to remember
that, while agreeing on new understandings and new actions is important, we all have much work to do, acting individually and in like-minded groups, to implement the obligations of the Convention and the understandings already reached. We should never lose sight of these challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.