STATEMENT by
TURKEY

at the
Thematic Debate on
OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

68th SESSION of the
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIRST COMMITTEE

25 October 2013, New York
Mr. Chairman,

As we continue our deliberations, we are once again discussing an issue that should only belong in the annals of history. As we have repeated time and again, weapons of mass destruction do not guarantee the security of any country, but rather increase insecurity and instability. All types of weapons of mass destruction should be urgently eliminated, and their names should only be pronounced in discussions to remind ourselves and future generations of the catastrophes they could and have brought about, so that they are never used again.

Fortunately, we have jointly taken bold steps to agree to dismantle and to never use such weapons again. The 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), are among such efforts. Turkey is party to all three multilateral instruments that guide the norms regarding the cluster under discussion today, and does not hold, develop or conduct any research on such weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

The existence of chemical weapons in the world and especially in the Middle East is a major concern for Turkey, countries in the region and the international community as a whole. Unfortunately, chemical weapons have been used three times in the past three decades in our immediate neighbourhood. Sadly, the last one was this very year, more than a decade into the 21st Century. We were once again faced with appalling images, reminding us of the indiscriminate and inhumane nature of such weapons.

The tragic event that took place in Damascus on 21 August was not only an attack against its victims, but against the very basic principles and values on which human civilization is built upon. It was a horrendous crime against humanity and a violation of international law. Its perpetrators must be promptly brought to justice.

We welcome the Framework Agreement reached in Geneva on 14 September and the ensuing UN Security Council Resolution 2118. The placement of the chemical weapons inventory under international control and their destruction are important in terms of eliminating a threat against regional and global peace and security.

On the other hand, the lessons learned throughout many conflicts, including the one in Syria, entail us to act with caution and vigilance. The lengthiness of the envisaged process must not be abused to gain time. It is now the responsibility of the Security Council and the international community at large to follow vigorously the implementation of the Framework Agreement in accordance with the timetable agreed at the OPCW.

Moreover, this process should not be perceived as the final solution to the conflict. It should not be forgotten that the greatest sum of Syrian casualties were caused by conventional weapons.

The process of elimination of chemical weapons in Syria is a stark reminder of the importance of universalizing and effectively implementing the CWC, as well as the key role that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) plays and its efficiency. We welcome the awarding of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW, which is undertaking such an important mission in the name of humanity, and extend our heartfelt congratulations to its dedicated staff, under the able leadership of its Director General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü.
Mr. Chairman,

Turkey attaches great importance to the BWC, its universalization and full implementation. The spread and transfer of dual-use goods and technology that can be used to produce biological weapons and possibility of them falling into the hands of terrorists are major concerns for the international community. Coupled with other weapons of mass destruction, the fact that those agents are so easy to attain, has made such concerns all the more significant.

Confidence-building measures remain an important instrument to promote the purpose of the BWC. Although considerably improved, the submission of reports has not increased to a desirable level. CBM reports are valuable tools for mutual understanding and transparency. We should strive to make tangible use of this source of information.

We also believe that scientific and technological developments should also be taken into account. Awareness of the innovations in the science, as well as their implications for the BWC, is necessary to address the complex challenges in this area.

Unfortunately, the Convention lacks a verification regime, as in the case of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which would be a very useful mechanism. We consider that such a mechanism would contribute to the strengthening of the Convention’s effectiveness.

Finally, the Meeting of Experts last August identified some important issues that will help further advance our work at the coming Meeting of States Parties.

Mr. Chairman,

The international community must continue to do its utmost to prevent the acquisition of biological and chemical warfare agents by terrorists, other unauthorized actors or even states, and for their stockpiles to be destroyed. In this context, the universalization and effective implementation of both the CWC and the BWC must be a priority. We call on all countries to ratify and implement these two important instruments. We also support the strengthening of the implementation of Resolution 1540, which is a key instrument to prevent the acquisition of WMDs by non-state actors.

In this context, regional approaches that pave the way for eventual universality should be utilized. Turkey has been actively promoting the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. We, once again would like to express our disappointment that the 2012 Conference could not be held, and our expectation for it to be convened as soon as possible. We urge all States of the region to participate in it, in a spirit of cooperation and flexibility.

Mr. Chairman,

We have to strive to emphasize the progressive face of mankind, and to not repeat past horrendous mistakes. This is even truer, now that we live in a new age, where we have the necessary legal instruments, information, experience, technology and other tools at our disposal, for sense and humanity to prevail; and as a result, for all WMDs to find their due place in the dark pages of history.

Thank you.