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Mr Chairman, Distinguished Representatives: The University of London appreciates the opportunity once again to participate in the NGO Statements offered to the Meeting of States Parties. We attach great importance to the BWC and our message is one of encouragement. We encourage you to bring this Intersessional Process to a productive conclusion and so set the scene for success at the Eighth Review Conference. This will require the formulation of clear consensus recommendations and widely acceptable text, so that all the necessary materials are ready for the Conference to take decisions: decisions which will reinforce the Convention with the strengthening it needs for its effective operation, including an Implementation Support Unit resourced so as to match the tasks entrusted to its staff, a dedicated forum for the collective discussion of annual CBM returns, and updated mandates for this annual Meeting and other elements of a restructured Intersessional Process. We encourage you to make every effort to achieve such outcomes.

Our statement first addresses **Standing Agenda Item II: Review of Developments in Science and Technology**

We have long taken a particular interest in the impact of developments in science and technology (S&T) on the health of the BWC and how you as the States Parties review this, latterly as a Standing Agenda Item. While this guaranteed frequency is an improvement on what happened before 2011, the overall experience has been disappointingly uneven. For the Convention to flourish there has to be a strengthening of its S&T review procedure.

S&T would benefit from upgrading into a dedicated forum such as an Open Ended Working Group with its Chair and Vice-Chairs appointed for several years at a time and a Scientific Secretary added to the establishment of the ISU to give the Group continuous professional support. Moreover, there would be advantage in having the Group meet separately from the Meeting of Experts in a restructured Intersessional Process and feed its recommendations to the States Parties directly. It should have a mandate as an organ of the Convention carrying forward the S&T review function envisaged from the start in Article XII - but henceforth on a more systematic basis.

Upgrading S&T to a dedicated Open Ended Working Group finds its justification in the wide extent of developments affecting the health of the BWC that need to be kept under review, across the range of the life sciences and beyond. Some appear to threaten the Convention while others may be of benefit. Certain gene editing technologies and 'gain-of-function' experiments with potential pandemic pathogens appear threatening; while advances in microbial forensics appear beneficial. These are just some examples. There are many more. S&T developments must be assessed collectively, and an Open Ended Working Group would be inclusive, open to all States Parties and (we would hope) to academies of science and other relevant organisations which could help in making these collective judgments.

One important way in which States Parties can demonstrate their commitment to the BWC is through applying the precautionary principle to dual-use research of concern (DURC) and ensuring that such research is prudently constrained. DURC is not banned by the Convention but if not sufficiently regulated it can damage the

BWC. Experiments deemed to carry excessive risks, broadly understood, should not be allowed at all. All DURC should be subject to comprehensive risk assessment and only allowed under rigorous justification - and then always under stringent control.

Within **Standing Agenda Item III: Strengthening National Implementation**, we attach particular importance to identifying those improvements in implementation, and transparency in reporting it, which will provide the most reassurance that the Convention is being observed. We welcome the initiative taken by the cross-regional sponsors of the Working Paper on Providing Reassurance in Implementation and hope they will pursue this initiative with ever-widening support, so that there can develop a full analytical and conceptual discussion of what is involved. To put it simply, States Parties need to find the best ways in which they can reassure one another, as treaty partners, and reassure all of us, that everything they are doing and everything they allow others to do is in line with the letter and the spirit of their BWC obligations. The prevention criterion in Article IV is relevant here: it is not enough to prohibit BW activities, they must be prevented.

The credibility of the Convention will suffer if States Parties do not give this task of reassurance the high priority it requires. It is basic to the treaty relationship. We hope one outcome of this Meeting of States Parties will be a clear recommendation to the Eighth Review Conference that, whatever form a restructured Intersessional Process may take, it must include this 'reassurance agenda'.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, we recall the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BWC's entry into force which we marked in March, and the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Geneva Protocol's signature which followed in June. These were occasions for all of us to commit ourselves afresh to nurturing these two treaties and keeping them relevant through changing times. We encourage everyone to join our extended discussion about the Geneva Protocol, at the lunchtime side event sponsored by UNIDIR and France.

Finally, we would like to highlight our new textbook coming out in early 2016 on biological disarmament and nonproliferation. The edited collection, by nearly 40 leading academics and experts, introduces readers to the politics, people, science and historical roots of contemporary biological threats.

We wish your Meeting of States Parties success in reaching consensus and in your important task of steering the BWC collectively into a constructive path of evolution. We thank you for your attention to our statement.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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\* The University of London dates from 1836, and is a major component of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom and beyond. It has evolved into a confederation of academically and financially autonomous colleges, which continue to share some central University of London institutions and a long history of joint endeavours in education and research. University College London (founded 1826) and King's College London (founded 1829) were the original colleges of the University of London, while the London School of Economics & Political Science (founded 1895) joined in 1900.