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STATEMENT BY VERTIC TO THE EIGHTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE 1972 BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION

Delivered by Scott Spence, Programme Director for National Implementation

Geneva, 8 November 2016

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

VERTIC congratulates you, Ambassador Molnár, as President of the Eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Congratulations are also in order for Liberia and Nepal for becoming the latest States to commit to the international norm against biological weaponry, enshrined in the treaty now under comprehensive review.

Mr President, the Convention is at a critical juncture. Over these next three weeks, the States Parties will take decisions that set the agenda for the next round of intersessional discussions, with a format and frequency still to be determined. The States Parties will also assess how successful their efforts have been since the last Review Conference to strengthen their national implementation of the Convention and enhance CBM submission rates, expand the BWC's membership, achieve the objectives of Article X, and institute mechanisms for reviewing developments in science and technology. VERTIC and civil society representatives to my left and right have also shared their views and expertise for many years, in this room and elsewhere, on how to strengthen the operation of the BWC. We trust that the States Parties will continue to draw upon this expert resource to inform their decisions and deliberations during this Review Conference and hereafter.

Mr President, legislative implementation of the Convention is more imperative than ever to counter asymmetric threats posed by non-State actors who are determined to kill and injure human, animal or plant populations with disease-causing agents. A State without effective legislation is a State ill-prepared to deal with this menace. Just as important, however, a State lacking effective regulatory measures for biosecurity may also lose out on the development and public health benefits arising from rapid advances in biotechnology. There should be no doubt that biotech firms and investors do assess whether governments are in a position to effectively manage Article III transfers of particularly dangerous disease-causing agents or sensitive equipment and technology. They also undertake due diligence to determine whether a State has in place Article IV measures to regulate research involving pathogens and toxins for purposes not prohibited by the Convention.

Mr President, to assist States in facing the challenges I have just highlighted, VERTIC has been partnering with governments, regional and international organisations and members of civil society to strengthen legislative implementation of the Convention. For example, in partnership with the Stimson Center and with generous funding from the Global Partnership Program of Global Affairs Canada, we are working closely with six States in Latin America and the Caribbean on legislative implementation



of the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions as well as the international instruments for nuclear security. This partnership, which we aim to expand to other regions in the coming years, leverages Stimson's close and ongoing contact with government officials with VERTIC's expertise in legislative analysis and drafting assistance across the international CBRN legal instruments.

Similarly, we are closely co-operating with the Government of Sierra Leone and the Global Emerging Pathogens Treatment Consortium to hold a workshop at the end of the month with funding from the United Kingdom's Strategic Programme Fund. We will develop a legislative framework for biosecurity that can prevent and respond to major disease events in future such as Ebola, whether they arise from natural or intentional causes. VERTIC, the GET Consortium and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy invite you to hear more about this work at a side event on Thursday afternoon. Other countries have come to recognise, like Sierra Leone, that it is advantageous to develop legislative frameworks for biosecurity and biosafety that take into account a number of international instruments. We are therefore pleased to be co-operating with six countries in Central Asia, and with consortium partners from the Netherlands and the UK, on legislative implementation and training through a One Health approach that encompasses the BWC, International Health Regulations and Codex Alimentarius. Project 53, under contract to the International Science and Technology Center, is funded by the European Union's CBRN Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative.

Mr President, I will conclude by extending an invitation to a VERTIC side event on 22 November to present on two projects we have completed with funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first is a new online tool, freely available in English and French on our website, to assist States to draft BWC implementing legislation remotely. The second is a report from which we will present summary findings on the progress States have made to implement Articles III and IV of the Convention. We encourage the States Parties to consider our findings as they work towards consensus language on legislative implementation in the Review Conference report. We also call upon all States Parties to recognise in the report civil society's valuable contributions to the BWC through new tools, co-operative partnerships and an unquestionable commitment to the treaty's success.

Thank you Mr President.