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STATEMENT BY VERTIC TO THE 2013 MEETING OF STATES PARTIES TO THE 1972 BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS CONVENTION

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Madame Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, on behalf of VERTIC, for once again providing my organisation and others the opportunity to address this Meeting. VERTIC strongly supports and values the continued growth and reach of the BWC network, which now includes States Parties; the Implementation Support Unit; the BWC Action; international and regional organisations as well as the diverse grouping of academics, researchers and scientists, NGOs, think tanks, and pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies that together comprise civil society.

Universality

Madame Chair, VERTIC remains strongly committed to co-operating with States Parties, the ISU and BWC Action in carrying out the difficult but necessary work of getting countries to join the Convention. While the 18th Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention rightly took proud note last week of the 190 States Parties to that treaty, Somalia and Syria being the latest, the BWC still lags behind at 170 States Parties. There are several reasons for this; however, the principal one may be the lack of a treaty organisation for the BWC, equivalent to the OPCW, with the resources and time to reach out and travel to non-States Parties. These States must be convinced one by one, in capitals if necessary, of the benefits of joining the family of nations which finds biological weapons repugnant to the conscience of mankind.

Madame Chair, VERTIC welcomed Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention in our statement to the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC last week. We regret, however, that Syria did not simultaneously ratify the Biological Weapons Convention, which it signed in April 1972. We encourage the BWC States Parties to remind Syria that, as a BWC signatory State, it must refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of the Convention, and that it should ratify the Convention without further delay.

VERTIC also welcomes Somalia's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which made it the 189th State Party. But, again, this would have been an excellent opportunity to also ratify the Biological Weapons Convention, which we encourage Somalia to now do without delay. For these reasons, Madame Chair, we took the opportunity at the CWC Conference of the States Parties to promote the possibility of future joint workshops for the remaining non-States Parties to both the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, in co-operation with the OPCW and BWC ISU.

There is now a successful precedent for such joint outreach. In April this year, VERTIC had the honour to co-organise joint workshops in Angola with the OPCW and the British Embassy in Luanda, with the participation of the BWC ISU and experts from Brazil and Portugal. These workshops had the objective of advancing Angola's accession to both the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions and received the full support of Angola's Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr Georges Chikoti. We were also pleased to hear statements of support during the workshops from the ambassadors of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. Have no doubt, however, that these workshops were expensive and required extensive planning including travel and conference logistics, as well as Portuguese-language presentations and documents. We are grateful to the United Kingdom for funding the BWC workshop costs. Nevertheless, when Angola joins the two Conventions, and thereby signals its complete condemnation of biological and chemical weaponry, the effort will have been well worth it. I am pleased to report that such joint outreach to another non-State Party to both Conventions is now underway.

National implementation

Madame Chair, joining the Biological Weapons Convention is a noble step for a State to take towards supporting the global norm against biological weapons, but it is not enough. The Convention must then be carefully and comprehensively implemented, including through national laws and regulations, which in turn must be enforced by capable, well-trained and well-equipped national officials.

VERTIC has carefully documented the status of national laws and regulations to implement the Biological Weapons Convention through 142 legislation surveys, which include information on key national implementation measures in a structured, organized way. We encourage States to review their VERTIC survey in order to identify gaps in their legislative frameworks that may need strengthening. We also encourage States to consider including their survey as part of their CBM Form 'E' submission to the Implementation Support Unit as well as in their reporting to the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee.

Madame Chair, the report of the Third Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention highlights that, regrettably, only 91 out of 190 States Parties have comprehensive legislation to implement its obligations, including the crucial prohibitions in Article VII, paragraph 1. As VERTIC's 142 surveys for implementation of the BWC indicate, the status of national implementation of this treaty is even less advanced. In light of this, we call on States to consider working simultaneously on their CWC *and* BWC implementing legislation, thereby fulfilling the obligations of two related treaties while maximizing national capacities and resources. VERTIC has provided support to a number of States to draft such legislation to date. We hereby offer our assistance to any State Party considering drafting legislation, in co-ordination with the BWC Implementation Support Unit, BWC Action and OPCW, to help them carry out these difficult but necessary and worthy commitments.

Madame Chair, VERTIC is proud to be an active partner in the European Union Council Decision in Support of the Biological Weapons Convention, which is being implemented by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs. Two of VERTIC's Legal Officers were in Benin and Burkina Faso last week for those countries' first workshops under the BWC Action's extended assistance project. And I participated in a mission to Ecuador in October this year for national awareness-raising and legislative drafting workshops, as part of that country's extended assistance project. VERTIC has also been an active participant in the BWC Action's regional workshops, and has contributed two modules to a guidance brochure on national implementation, which is well along the way to completion. VERTIC looks forward to continued co-operation with the ISU and BWC Action, which is being ably implemented by Karin Hjalmarsson and Jacklin Georges, and to a renewal of the Action beyond September 2014 so that the momentum we are achieving is not lost.

Thank you Madame Chair.