Permanent Mission of Italy to the
Conference on Disarmament

**Statement delivered by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament to the Sixth Session of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention**

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Chair,

I would like to start with a general consideration. This is probably the thorniest issue that we have to face. There is no easy solution to the question of compliance and verification. We have made remarkable progress on the two mechanisms and we should formally establish them, but we still have a long way to go on compliance and verification. We won't certainly agree on concrete measures any time soon, even less so on a compliance and verification regime, we have to be aware of this, and our mandate at this stage is simply to identify, examine and develop measures and recommend something to the X Review Conference. So we need more time than what we have until the next Review Conference. This is why we support the proposal contained in the rolling text to recommend the establishment of an open-ended working group. I will make some general comments now and perhaps we will provide specific language proposal at a later stage.

The way we see it, an open-ended working group should be established by the Review Conference. Your paper seems to suggest that it is indeed established by the X review conference, with a report to bee submitted at the XI review conference. However, this open-ended working group could also be established earlier, by a special conference, the same one that we could convene to establish the two mechanisms if we have one such conference before the next review conference. Our roadmap could be this: establish the two mechanisms and at the same time establish this open-end working group on compliance and verification, with the same decision.

But if we fail to do that before the next review conference, we have to propose something at that Conference that is not just the establishment of an open-ended working group. In that case, our goal should be to not only agree on the terms of reference and the mandate of this working group but also to come to some general understanding on what type of system of compliance and verification we would like to create.

The rolling text contains some useful suggestions on the way forward that we can already support, while other parts need to be further discussed.

We note with interest paragraph 23.b) on confidence-building measures. We believe that mandatory CBMs, anchored in a peer-review process to consider and discuss them, would not simply complement compliance and verification but would actually be a key component of a what we have been calling a composite compliance and verification regime.

In paragraph 23.e), we would not be against considering institutional arrangements modelled on what we have in the OPCW and IAEA but we would strongly caution against drawing parallels. Biological weapons are much more difficult to verify and much easier to hide than chemical or nuclear weapons. So let's bear this in mind.

In paragraph 23.f), we do not fully understand what is meant by investigative measures to look into allegations of possible non compliance. Is this just about allegations or about investigations of a violation? Because in this latter case there should be a mention of the Secretary General's mechanism and how these measures would work with the mechanism and

possibly support it and complement it. In this case the need to have some balance between effective verification capabilities and the protection of sensitive national security information and confidential proprietary rights would be less strict.

On paragraph 24, if the idea is to resurrect some proposals from the past, for instance from what was discussed within the VEREX/ad hoc group, we would not be over-enthusiastic. Of course we are not against old ideas if they are still good but we would caution against going back for solutions to an exercise that failed, considering also that so much has changed in the meantime.

One thing that is missing here is a reference to the mechanisms. Almost two years ago, we pointed out the relevance of the mechanisms in order to make progress on compliance and verification. Let me repeat that argument now. If we had an ICA mechanism we could ask it to help us achieve compliance of the BWC by enhancing States parties' capabilities, for instance by assisting them in ensuring the safety and security of their biological facilities. If we had an S&T mechanism we could task it to look at the technical and scientific challenges of verification. An S&T mechanism could help us understand all the relevant points such as: what is technically feasible and what is not, which biotechnologies can be verified and how, what a given procedure would consist of, how inspections and investigations could be carried out from a strictly technical point of view, what economic costs this would imply, what level of intrusiveness such a system would or could have. We need scientists to make progress on compliance and verification. It should not be for an open-ended working group to consider things such as terminology, list of pathogens, threshold quantities, equipment, modalities of inspections and investigations and so on and so forth. We need sound scientific advice to look into all those technical issues and develop any consistent verification regime. And this is why we believe we should have an S&T mechanism in place as soon as possible as it would guide us through this process. Without one such mechanisms and its science-based advice – and without the dialogue with industry and academia that this mechanism could provide – no sound and effective political decision could be taken on

verification. This is why the roadmap for us is very clear: first we establish the two mechanisms, then this open-ended working group. We should not go ahead on this open-ended working group if we don't have the two mechanisms in place.