Mr Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and my own country, Norway.

Last year’s terrible chemical weapons attacks in Syria shocked an entire world and reminded us that the use of weapons of mass destruction continues to be a serious threat. Laboratories in Finland and Sweden were among those that provided chemical analysis in support of the UN investigation of alleged use, which was led by Dr Åke Sellström. The elimination of Syria’s declared chemical weapons, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2118, is now almost completed.
It was essential to remove the chemical weapons from Syria to ensure that they would not again be used against the civilian population or fall into the hands of militant groups. The international mission to remove and destroy these weapons was unprecedented. Despite the ongoing brutal civil war, the international community succeeded in removing Syria's declared chemical weapons in a peaceful manner. This is the first time a country's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction has been removed in such a way.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)–UN Joint Mission on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons completed its mandate on 30 September. The Nordic countries would like to thank Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag for her extraordinary efforts and leadership, and all the Joint Mission staff for their tireless work, often under very difficult and dangerous circumstances. Their work has been vital to the international community's success in eliminating Syria's declared chemical weapons arsenal.

The international cooperation on this mission was excellent. Denmark – in close collaboration with Norway – had a leading role in coordinating the maritime task group that carried out the transport operation. Denmark and Norway provided merchant ships to transport the chemical weapons, as well as navy escort ships, for an extended period of time. Finland contributed a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) team to the maritime task group. China, Russia and the United Kingdom made invaluable contributions as well. The Nordic countries would like to thank our partners in this mission for their constructive and valuable contributions.

The Nordic countries assisted the Joint Mission in other areas as well. Denmark and Sweden put significant air transport capacity at the disposal of the Joint Mission. Finland provided a vessel protection detachment to support M/V Cape Ray, and the Finnish waste management
company Ekokem is involved in the ongoing work on the destruction of the Syrian chemicals.

In many ways, the operation represented new and unchartered territory for the international community. We therefore believe it will be important to carry out a lessons learned exercise, as this could offer invaluable insights for similar operations in the future.

Mr Chair,

The Nordic countries are deeply concerned that the OPCW fact finding mission has confirmed reports of recent systematic and repeated use of chlorine gas against civilians in Syria. The use of this toxic chemical as a weapon is a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of Security Council resolution 2118. All perpetrators of abuses and war crimes in Syria, including the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable. We fully support the intention of the OPCW Director-General that the fact finding mission should continue its work. We share the view that the information presented by the fact finding mission is clear cut, including the reports from witnesses that attacks are invariably linked to the use of helicopters. Only the Syrian regime possesses the capability to use helicopters in this way.

We call on Syria to cooperate with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the OPCW to achieve the destruction of the remaining production facilities. We also urge Syria to cooperate with the OPCW Assessment Team on the verification of its chemical weapons declarations and the discrepancies they contain.

Meanwhile, the civil war in Syria is continuing with devastating effects. The humanitarian costs are increasing every day. It is therefore imperative that the efforts to find a political solution to the conflict continue.

(Check against delivery)
Mr Chair,

While the situation in Syria will remain the most important issue for the OPCW in the near future, we must not lose sight of the important task of following up the Chemical Weapons Convention.

 Destruction of chemical weapons in the possessor states is a vital task, and is far from completed. The Nordic countries urge the Russian Federation, the United States of America and Libya to expedite the destruction of their arsenals and meet their destruction targets.

We also urge the countries that are not party to the Convention to accede and become members of the OPCW. Moreover, State Parties that have not fully implemented the Convention are urged to do so. Fostering international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry and the prevention of terrorism are also important goals. For many State Parties, these are major incentives to remain engaged with the OPCW.

As we look to the future, the Nordic countries realise that the OPCW must continue to have staff with the necessary experience, skills and expertise to meet its operational requirements and address contingencies. Norway and Sweden, along with their partners, will therefore continue to support the proposal for the rehiring of experienced OPCW inspectors.

Mr Chair,

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) is a cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. The Nordic countries recognise that biotechnology is a rapidly evolving science, and that ambitious and forward-looking initiatives are required to strengthen the BTWC.

(Check against delivery)
We believe States Parties should focus on areas where unity is possible, and on practical steps that can strengthen the Convention in a constructive manner. These include efforts to improve national implementation, to universalise the Convention, to enhance current confidence-building measures, and to strengthen the practical collaboration between the scientific and disarmament communities.

The Nordic countries will seek to ensure that the on-going efforts to reinforce the BTWC regime will include strengthening the Secretary-General’s investigative mechanism for alleged use of biological weapons.

Mr Chair,

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is a strong reminder of how serious the spread of communicable disease can be. Ebola is not only a health crisis, but also a humanitarian, economic and security crisis.

The Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) was launched in February this year. It represents a joint effort by nations, international organisations and civil society to accelerate progress toward a world that is safe and secure from infectious disease threats; to promote global health security as an international priority; and to establish capacity to prevent, detect and rapidly respond to biological threats, whether naturally occurring, intentional, or accidental.

The Global Health Security Agenda will spur progress toward full implementation of WHO’s International Health Regulations and other relevant global health security frameworks. We see these processes as mutually reinforcing. Coordination with WHO and other relevant UN
bodies to avoid duplication and strengthen the international effort will remain an important priority. The Nordic countries have also made national commitments under the Global Health Security Agenda. Denmark is leading a biosecurity programme in East Africa, which is based on the Danish biosecurity system. Finland has committed itself to a five-year biosafety and biosecurity capacity-building project in Tanzania. Sweden will play a leading role in the work against antimicrobial resistance, while Norway will focus on strengthening WHO International Health Regulations capacity in four to six countries.

The Nordic countries are thus playing an active role in this international effort. In addition, Finland is a member of the GHSA Steering Group and will chair the Steering Group in 2015.

Thank you for your attention.