Chairperson, thank you for this opportunity to make a statement on the agenda item under discussion.

The Republic of Zambia welcomes the Director General’s Report on Smallpox Eradication and notes the destruction of variola virus stocks in South Africa and the United States of America. Zambia is also in full support of the statement made by Togo on behalf of the member states of the African Region.

As the Assembly is aware, the eradication of smallpox four decades ago is one of the greatest public health accomplishments of humankind and scientific endeavor, demonstrating that unity of purpose and concerted effort can achieve a better state of health for all. However, the world is now increasingly threatened by resurgence of smallpox, owing largely to advancements in synthetic biology and other molecular biology technologies. While we note the need for research activities aimed at developing better antiviral treatments and vaccines for emerging and re-emerging pox viruses, we support a cautious approach and stricter controls in the use of live variola viruses. We applaud the efforts that have already culminated in the development of antiviral therapies and the growing global stockpile of vaccines against smallpox and similar viruses. In line with efforts to promote the maintenance of a smallpox-free world, the Republic of Zambia therefore applauds the Republic of South Africa and the United States of America for the vigilance and transparency demonstrated in declaring their stocks of variola virus and related genetic materials, and also for permitting the WHO biosafety experts, the Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research and others to witness and certify the destruction of those stocks. Zambia further calls on all other Member States that may be harboring such stocks to similarly come to the fore and ensure that these materials are destroyed.

Finally Chairperson, the Republic of Zambia welcomes the WHO’s recommendations concerning the synthesis and use of variola virus DNA and affirms commitment to incorporate these into the national biosafety legislation and guidelines.

I thank you.