



SRI LANKA

Statement

By

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**At the High-Level Segment of the United Nations Conference to
Review Progress Made In the Implementation of the Programme
of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in
Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects**

New York, 26 June, 2006

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam on his election as the President of this conference. I assure you the fullest cooperation of my delegation to lead this conference towards a successful conclusion.

Over the years, and particularly since the adoption of the UN Programme of Action in 2001, Sri Lanka has worked tirelessly at local, national and international levels to address the challenges posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Your election as the President of this Conference is also a manifestation of that commitment Sri Lanka has shown at international level.

Mr. President,

The accumulation and proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons continues to be a serious threat to peace, stability and sustainable development in many parts of the world. Small arms and light weapons kill people on a massive scale. According to some estimates, about 1000 people die every day, impacting on the most vulnerable groups in society.

Five years since the adoption of the POA, we have gathered here to review and take stock of what we have achieved so far and to adopt an outcome document further committing ourselves to ensure that small arms and light weapons do not end up in the hands of unauthorized recipients, in particular terrorists and criminals. There are many areas where we have made progress during the last five years. Yet, much more needs to be done to ensure the full and effective implementation of the POA.

Sri Lanka was the first to establish a National Commission to deal with the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, in the region. The National Commission consists of all stake holders, including civil society, which works in tandem with the government to implement the POA. In fact, my delegation to this conference includes two representatives from civil society.

As a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the POA, in my country, more than 35,000 small arms were destroyed at a public weapons destruction event in 2005 organised by the National Commission. The event created a great deal of public awareness on the issue and was also seen as a confidence-building measure for taking steps to effectively address the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in Sri Lanka. Earlier this month, the National Commission, in partnership with Saferworld, conducted a pilot survey on small arms and community safety in Hambanthota District, in the south of Sri Lanka. It is expected that the findings, methodology and lessons learned of this survey will be useful in planning and conducting a nation-wide survey.

Sri Lanka is pleased to submit our national report to this conference with yet another update on the national implementation of the POA. This is in addition to the reports that we have already submitted in 2003 and 2005 at the two Biennial Meetings.

Mr. President,

The nexus between terrorism and trafficking of weapons constitutes an unprecedented challenge in the full implementation of the POA. Moreover, the heinous crime against humanity of forced recruitment of child soldiers in conflict situations around the world is primarily a result of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We all know that thousands of children in the world today who are forced to take up arms, leaving their homes, schools and playgrounds, are first trained in the handling of small arms and light weapons.

In our view, the excessive accumulation and easy availability of small arms and light weapons and ammunition is the primary cause for illicit trafficking and trade in small arms and light weapons. We therefore, call upon this conference to take further measures to interdict and curb this unbridled supply of these weapons to non-State actors such as terrorists and criminals. Sri Lanka believes that a separate multilateral process should be initiated as a follow-up to this conference to find new approaches to deny the access of small arms and light weapons to non-State actors.

We share the view that authorizations for arms transfers need to be streamlined and effective systems for end-user certification should be in place to prevent legal transfers from ending up in the hands of unauthorized recipients, such as terrorists and criminals.

In this context, international and regional cooperation with regard to the interdiction of shipments carrying illicit conventional weapons needs to be further strengthened through effective border and customs control and information sharing among law enforcement authorities. We call for greater regional action and cooperation in this regard, including in the Asian region. Sri Lanka became the first Asian country to implement the Container Security Initiative and Mega Port Initiative and we are confident that these specific measures will also contribute to the further strengthening of our common efforts to prevent conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, from falling into the hands of terrorists and criminals.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka supports measures for the prevention of illicit transfer and unauthorized access to and use of Man-portable Air Defence Systems. These defence systems can be easily carried, concealed, fired and obtained by non-State actors. While we continue to strengthen international and regional cooperation aimed at preventing these weapon systems from falling into the hands of non-State actors, it is important to address this issue further preferably by a group of governmental experts as a part of the follow-up process of this conference.

A small arm is a stick if it is without ammunition. Therefore we believe that if we are to eliminate illegal use of small arms from our midst, we also need to find ways and means to curb and eradicate illicit trade in ammunition. Therefore, further steps have to be considered to address this issue in a comprehensive manner. In this regard, while we urge all States to put in place appropriate controls on stockpiles of ammunition at national level, we also support the recommendation made by the Working Group on Tracing to initiate a separate multilateral process on ammunition.

Mr. President,

International cooperation and assistance for national capacity building and to assist in matching needs with resources play an integral part in the full implementation of the POA. Resource mobilization, lessons learned, sharing of best practices and training and capacity building of law enforcement officials play an important role. Compilation of a database on the needs of affected States and to undertake a study on the financial and technical needs of developing countries in implementing the POA are important further steps that we can take in this direction.

Sri Lanka has already benefited from international assistance, in particular in connection with the establishment of the National Commission and capacity building of relevant government officials and civil society actors. We are grateful for the technical and financial assistance received from the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Saferworld.

Mr. President,

We need to make further progress within the POA context on our work relating to several other important areas such as brokering, marking and tracing, stockpile management and security, destruction of surplus weapons and sharing best practices. We must also endeavor to address further, several other important aspects such as special needs of children, women and elderly, victim assistance, education and public awareness, rehabilitation, disarmament, weapons collection and demobilization.

Mr. President,

My delegation hopes that a forward-looking outcome document with a set of realistic and achievable targets and a strengthened and goal oriented follow-up mechanism will be adopted by this conference in order to ensure full and effective implementation of the POA.

Thank you.