



**Statement by H.E. Dr. Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the
United Nations, at the 2017 Substantive Session of the UN Disarmament
Commission**

(New York, 03rd April 2017)

Madam Chair,

First of all, I wish to congratulate you and other members of the Bureau as well as the Chairs of the two Working Groups on your election.

I also wish to take this opportunity to commend the tireless efforts made by Ambassador Odo Tevi of Vanuatu as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission in its 2016 substantive session, and the important work carried out by the two Chairs of the Working Groups; Kazakhstan and Morocco.

I thank Mr. Kim Won-soo, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for his statement, which shed light on the current issues in global disarmament.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka attaches great importance to the work of the UN Disarmament Commission. We strongly subscribe to the significance of the Commission with its universal membership as the sole specialized and deliberative body within the UN multilateral disarmament apparatus that consider specific disarmament issues and submit concrete recommendations to the General Assembly.

It is noteworthy that this year's substantive session of the UN Disarmament Commission is being held just after the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. We see the Conference as an important step in the process of taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, the first multilateral negotiations on nuclear weapons since the CTBT.

The momentum created by this Conference should be utilized to eliminate the sense of defeatism that permeates the international deliberations on disarmament, and to revive the diminishing interest of States towards general and complete disarmament.

In the same vein, it would be prudent to use that momentum to inject motivation to the UN Disarmament Commission, which unfortunately has not been able to achieve any concrete results during the past sixteen years or so. It is imperative that we endeavour to achieve tangible recommendations during the current substantive session of the Commission.

As we have advocated time and again, achieving concrete results in this sole specialized deliberative body within the UN multilateral disarmament apparatus would require political will and flexibility on the part of all Member States.

Madam Chair,

The risk of catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons will remain as long as nuclear weapons exist. Total elimination of nuclear weapons would be the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The transboundary and global impact of nuclear weapons jeopardizes the protection and security of populations. Nuclear weapons are inhumane and indiscriminate by nature.

While the elimination of stockpiles by nuclear weapon States remains slow, continuing nuclear weapon tests compromise peace and stability of the world. The danger of nuclear material falling into terrorist hands is another serious dimension that we must pay attention in the current context when discussing nuclear weapons.

Strengthening the disarmament treaty regime is indispensable to ensure a rule-based regime for nuclear disarmament. In this context, we reiterate our support to the key recommendations of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC) (2006) including the paramount value of multilateralism and the overall importance of international law in reaching the goal of disarmament.

In this regard, we also wish to reiterate the centrality of the NPT, the cornerstone of the international legal regime on nuclear weapons, including the 2010 NPT Action Plan and the 13 Practical Steps to disarmament, agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka believes that space exploration and the utilization of outer space make invaluable contributions to the advancement of humankind. While space exploration offers abundant opportunities, it is incumbent upon those who explore and use it, to prevent outer space from becoming the theatre for an arms race.

With increased space activities, there are justifiable concerns that the space environment is gradually becoming congested. Potential militarization and the weaponization of the space environment could be a prelude to the grave danger of outer space becoming a contested area and a source of conflict.

We have long held the view that the prevention of an arms race in outer space and keeping it free of conflict is essential to avert a grave danger for international peace and security.

It is our firm conviction that the early conclusion of an International Agreement on the Prevention of the Arms Race in Outer Space would definitely strengthen the existing legal framework.

In this context, I am pleased to inform you that at the 71st Session of the UNGA Egypt and Sri Lanka together tabled at the First Committee the draft resolution on '*Prevention of an arms race in outer space*' which called for negotiation of a multilateral instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space at the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam Chair,

The category of conventional weapons is perhaps less dramatic in nature and more limited in scope compared to Weapons of Mass Destruction. However due to their wide use in internal and international armed conflicts, these weapons continue to inflict death and tremendous damage globally on a daily basis.

The situation is further aggravated due to the illicit trade and unregulated spread of conventional weapons that has allowed the non-state armed groups to use these weapons in a manner contrary to the principles of IHL, and the victims are largely innocent civilian populations.

As a country, which suffered from a three-decade long internal armed conflict, Sri Lanka is also well aware of the ramifications of the use of conventional weapons by such groups.

In this context, it is imperative that we pay attention on the implementation of and compliance with conventions, treaties and regulations pertaining to conventional weapons, as well as strengthen the international law in this area, to alleviate undue suffering. This will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal no 16, to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

Sri Lanka values the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) as a principal instrument of IHL, which strikes the right balance between the legitimate security concerns of States, and compliance with IHL principles.

In this context, we welcome the on-going discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) under the CCW framework. Sri Lanka particularly welcomes the outcome of the 2016 Meeting of Experts on LAWS, which agreed on a set of recommendations, as per the mandate agreed to at the 2015 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention, which Sri Lanka had the privilege to Chair.

As outgoing Chair of the 2015 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the CCW, at the 71st Session of the UNGA, Sri Lanka tabled The Annual First Committee Resolution on *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons*, which was adopted by consensus.

Madam Chair,

As we work towards our shared goal of general and complete disarmament, disarmament education and research assume a great importance. In this regard, we extend our appreciation to the work of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). It is essential that Member States support UNIDIR's work enabling the Institute to carry out its unique mandate effectively.

Madam Chair,

We are in a time when Disarmament has assumed an unprecedented degree of importance in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to build "peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development" targeting "significant reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere". The work of this Commission is extremely important to achieve those targets. We have to achieve these targets and the time has come to overcome the sense of defeatism in the international deliberations towards general and complete disarmament.

Thank you.