



**Statement by
H.E. Mohan Pieris, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN
General Debate of the First Committee
76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
New York: 6th October 2021**

Mr. President,

We would like to join other delegations in congratulating H.E. Ambassador Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco on his election as Chair of this Committee and to other members of the Bureau on their election. Please be assured of Sri Lanka's fullest cooperation and support in your work to steer this Committee to a successful conclusion. We wish you every success in your tasks ahead. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to Ambassador Agustín Santos Maraver of Spain on his chairmanship of the previous session.

At the outset, my delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her valuable remarks at the start of our debate. We remain concerned about the slow pace in the realm of nuclear disarmament and strongly feel that more must be done to work on our collective goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. We note with alarm that the High Representative indicated that despite a global pandemic, Global military expenditure last year reached 2 Trillion dollars. We join other calls to stress the need to reduce these expenditures and note that these resources may have been better directed towards economic and social development for the betterment of humanity, particularly when the world is still grappling with the aftermath of a global pandemic.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that all our Countries have committed to acknowledges the link between peace and development. Achieving much of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals requires a substantial financial investment, and redirection of funds from military purposes to crucial economic and social development can make a key contribution.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has shown how vulnerable the world is to pathogens and disease. It is also a sharp reminder that there is a pressing need to improve our global health security.

Mr. President,

We are pleased that there has been some progress in the new START agreement and hope that this would build momentum for other measures to begin to bear fruit.

We however remain concerned of the development of new Nuclear weapons and the expression of military doctrines of some nuclear weapon states, as well as the introduction of recent strategic partnerships with Nuclear Weapon states that includes strategic delivery systems with nuclear technology, and hope this would not contribute to an escalation of an arms race.

Mr. President,

We need to take bold collective and concerted action together, at the forthcoming NPT review conference. Sri Lanka, attaches the highest priority to full compliance with, and effective promotion of, the implementation of the NPT without further delay, and respect for its three pillars; the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

Sri Lanka underscores that the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty is an essential pillar of international peace and security, and remains the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

We strongly believe that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing and are vital for the strengthening international peace and security. Both must be pursued equally.

The NPT Review Conference will be an important opportunity for us to rededicate ourselves to strengthen our global efforts towards non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We look forward to work with renewed vigor so we can build on our collective efforts to maintain international peace and security without the existence and use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President,

Global nuclear disarmament was the subject of this Assembly's first resolution in 1946 and remains one of the oldest goals of this august body. The threat of Nuclear weapons remains more critical than ever before and it remains the greatest threat to humanity. Their testing and use would have catastrophic effects for our entire planet. The total elimination of Nuclear Weapons would be the only absolute guarantee against the grave dangers they pose to humanity.

Sri Lanka remains steadfast to our commitment to non-proliferation and its opposition to nuclear weapons. We remain concerned that states are now modernizing their nuclear arsenals with increasingly destructive capabilities and developing new weapons and delivery systems. The grave risk of accidental, mistaken or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons remains ever present or falling to cyber-attacks or that of terrorists.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka seeks to advance and promote respect for the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention and continue to call for their effective and non-discriminatory implementation.

This year marked the 45th anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction and with the support of 183 State Parties continues to be relevant and a priority for states. Today, the norm against biological weapons remains strong, and there is common acceptance by the international community on the non-use of disease / biological weapons. However, the international community must remain vigilant and state parties should update the mechanisms within the Convention for reviewing advances in science and technology and work together to improve bio-security and bio-preparedness, to enable countries to be equipped to prevent and respond to the possible use of biological weapons. The BWC 9th Review Conference to be held in 2021 is an opportune time to address these issues, under the Chairmanship of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka is committed to strengthen international cooperation and assistance to fully realise the objectives of the BWC, alongside universalization and sustained focus on national implementation and to this end convened a number of expert meetings and preparatory meetings this year as a lead up to the conference next year.

Sri Lanka signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993 and remains committed in delivering on its national obligations related to the Conventions. The National Authority in Sri Lanka has been re-oriented, with greater focus on security and disarmament aspects. In the backdrop of alleged use of Chemical Weapons in certain parts of the world, Sri Lanka joins other Member States in urging all State Parties to respect their obligations under the Convention, and refrain from use of these horrendous and indiscriminate weapons.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka calls for practical steps towards the establishment of WMD-free zones and building upon the nuclear free zones that already exist, and, in particular, in the regions where such zones are not in place.

In this regard, we are pleased that the adoption of General Assembly Decision on convening the second conference on the establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other WMD under the Presidency of Kuwait. We urge all States to participate and bring to a conclusion a legally binding treaty on the establishment of a zone.

Mr. President,

As a country that had experienced three decades of a separatist terrorist conflict and the deadly Easter Sunday terrorist attack in 2018, Sri Lanka is acutely aware of the devastation and destruction that is caused by small arms and light weapons (SALW) and illicit trade of weapons, where non-state actors are able to easily acquire illicit access to SALW. We remain committed to the prevention, curbing and eradication of the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). These illicit trade flows often have devastating impacts on fueling violence and crime, forced displacement of civilians and massive human rights violations.

The diversion of small arms and light weapons is a threat to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Efforts towards the attainment of target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals in particular, is essential to reducing illicit arms flows and ensuring the establishment of stable environments conducive to development.

Many States continue to face capacity and resource challenges in addressing illicit arms flows. Effective and sustainable international cooperation and assistance remain essential cornerstones of the full and effective implementation of small arms and light weapons control measures and should be undertaken in bilateral, regional and international frameworks.

Greater steps must also be made to address all related aspects of the problem of illicit small arms, including weapons collection and destruction, adequate legal and policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, proper stockpile management, as well as education and awareness. We underscore that any measures relating to conventional arms control, including small arms and light weapons, must be taken on the basis of placing human beings at the center of all such efforts.

Mr. President,

Of all the weapons that have accumulated over years of war by states, few are more persistent and more indiscriminate than land-mines. Landmines continue to have grave health and socio-economic impacts for individuals and entire communities around the world. In the past two decades, over 54 million anti-personnel mines have been destroyed by State Parties to the historic Ottawa treaty.

As of last week, 1st October 2021, Sri Lanka was pleased to confirm that the Humanitarian Demining Unit of the Sri Lanka Army destroyed nearly 12,000 stockpiled anti-personnel mines; almost one year earlier than the deadline set for Sri Lanka by the Ottawa Convention, in the Kilinochchi District, in the Northern Province, of the country. Sri Lanka would be pleased to present more information and table a formal Declaration during the upcoming 19th Meeting of the States Parties that will take place in The Hague from 15-19 November.

Sri Lanka has continued to clear hazardous areas of landmines and as of 29th September 2021, has a remaining area of 12.78 sq kms to be cleared. We remain on the path to make Sri Lanka landmines-free and through sustained national efforts at mine risk education, we are pleased to have succeeded in bringing civilian casualties of landmines to zero.

Mr. President,

New technological advancements in ICT have given rise to new challenges in the international security landscape, particularly in cybercrime, cyber warfare and cyberattacks, that have increased drastically.

Sri Lanka would like to stress and underscore that Outer Space is part of the common heritage of humanity and part of our global commons. It remains humanity's last frontier that must be protected for humankind for peaceful exploration and utilization for peaceful purposes, for the collective benefit of all countries. There is a crucial need to ensure that outer space remains free of conflict, and it is vital that we prevent any militarization and weaponization of space.

It is for these reasons, that Sri Lanka and Egypt have jointly tabled an annual resolution for almost 4 decades titled "Prevention of an Arms race in Outer Space" that had enjoyed consensus for many years and enjoys near universal acceptance.

This year, this important resolution, will be introduced by Sri Lanka and we hope this resolution will continue to enjoy your wide support this year.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, Sri Lanka reaffirms its commitment to the disarmament agenda, and continues to pledge its full support and commitment to the multilateral disarmament machinery.

We would like to reiterate once again, the necessity for concerted, collective action towards non-proliferation and eradication of nuclear weapons, the curbing of the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Sri Lanka looks forward to meaningful and constructive engagement on these issues and others at this Session.

At this critical juncture, let us all re-dedicate ourselves to work with renewed vigor and commitment to collectively work towards reinforcing and enhancing the global agenda for peace and disarmament, and search for collective and cooperative ways to work with greater purpose for a better tomorrow and our future generations.

I thank you.