



Speech Delivered by H.E. Mr. A. L. A. Azeez, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in Geneva on the assumption of Presidency of the 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions

5 September 2018

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Friends from Civil Societies, Distinguished participants,

At the outset, let me thank you, Mr. President, for the effective stewardship you have provided to this 8th Meeting of the States Parties through meticulous preparation of the substantive process over the past one year. My gratitude extends to the staff of the Implementation Support Unit, particularly the Director, Ms. Sheila N. MWEEMBA, the Secretariat, Ms. Anja Kaspersen and her staff and your own colleagues in the Nicaraguan Mission. Delegations of States Parties and other stakeholders deserve special praise for their unstinted support and commitment in making this meeting a success.

It is a strong sense of purpose and shared objective that has brought all of us together to work towards a world free of cluster munitions, through a clear demonstration of political will, commitment and perseverance to achieve tangible results, enabled by a strong notion of ethical and humanitarian norms and a legal framework, international cooperation and assistance. This goal, however, will hardly be taken forward without the active national level implementation drives, and multi-stakeholder partnership and cooperation of the States Parties, particularly the defence establishments, the civil society, think-tanks, and international humanitarian organisations. The victims too, weigh in very much on the efforts towards prohibition and eventual total elimination of cluster munitions. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Cluster Munition Coalition deserve a special note of appreciation for their untiring efforts in this regard.

Having said this, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincerest appreciation of the confidence placed in my country, Sri Lanka, and in me, personally, to preside over the next phase of the continuum. The 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, of which I have been elected President today, is an important turning point for my country in its move towards humanitarian disarmament. From today on, a year-long process of open and inclusive consultation, advocacy, coordination, and strategic direction commences, with a strong and singular objective in view. That is the outcome-orientation of the process that will go on till September 2019, further strengthening the based for wider acceptance and universal recognition of the CCM. This would no doubt require consistent commitment, hard work, leadership and above all, wider stakeholder-ship. As the President of the 9th Meeting of the States Parties, I wish to assure all States Parties and stakeholders of constructive engagement and pragmatic guidance as we begin to collectively address challenges ahead and generate further momentum in our shared pursuit of the norms and objectives of the Convention.

The Convention is a culmination of the aspirations of people to a peaceful existence in a world which is increasingly marked by an unending cycle of conflicts and crises. We need progress in all thematic areas of the Convention, including international cooperation, victim assistance, storage and destruction, verification, compliance and more. Universalisation of the Convention and its norms is imperative for ensuring that the world remains free of cluster munitions, and that no quarter exists, that encourages production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions. As President, I would uphold the principles set forth in the Convention, work closely and diligently with all States Parties, be guided and assisted by theme coordinators with the continued support and engagement with the Implementation Support Unit, as well as other stakeholders and colleagues, in making a steady progress in our universalisation efforts.

Sri Lanka's Presidency of the next meeting of the States Parties is historic for several reasons. **First**, Sri Lanka became a State Party to the Convention on 1 March 2018, barely six months ago. We did so after acceding to an important treaty, the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. This followed a very delicate national process, after having made considerable progress towards making Sri Lanka a landmine-free country. Taking resolute action to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions banning an injurious and indiscriminate conventional weapon category, which Sri Lanka had never used during its almost three decades-long conflict, was the next logical step to follow.

Second, Sri Lanka's Presidency is an opportunity to clearly manifest both the commitment as well as the progress made in advancing reconciliation and peacebuilding since the current Government came to office in 2015. Our national efforts as underlined in Vision 2025 is firmly embedded in a social-market economy that is competitive and business friendly with the aim of enhancing economic dividends for all. In this context, priorities that contribute to lasting peace and unity while yielding sustainable socio-economic benefits, were imperative. Becoming a State Party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions was clearly identified as one of such priorities and a key enabler.

Third, Sri Lanka has been working closely with our international partners in consolidating the gains made in sustainable peace and development. Our leadership, built on the strength of national accomplishments, could therefore serve as a catalyst for and inspire other countries to appreciate the value of peacebuilding and national advancement in realizing sustainable, peaceful and inclusive societies.

All these remain laudable objectives. However, the practical achievement of the target of a world free of cluster munitions demands great dedication, concerted vision and collective initiatives and responses. Sri Lanka and its Presidency, supported by the Coordination Committee, would do all that is possible to strive towards realising this vision in the coming year- which also marks a crucial year bridging the transition onto the second decade of the CCM and building momentum on to the Second Review Process of the CCM that will take place under the able leadership of Switzerland in the year 2020.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished participants,

Thank you all once again for the honour bestowed on my country and myself with the Presidency of the 9th Meeting of the States Parties.

I look forward to working closely with all of you in the coming months.