

**DELEGATION OF SRI LANKA TO THE
CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT**



STATEMENT

By

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Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
to the Conference on Disarmament
at the Plenary Session**

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(Check against delivery)

Mr President,

My delegation is delighted to see you, Ambassador of Switzerland, at the helm of our work this month. As the CD prepares for what would hopefully be a year of some substantive work, we are pleased to participate in your vigorous programme of consultations. The CD is equipped to make headway under your able leadership. We are deeply indebted to Ambassador Lars Norberg for the solid foundation which he laid to facilitate progress.

Mr President,

My previous tour of duty here in Geneva brought me to the Conference on Disarmament about ten years ago. During the intervening period the CD has no doubt, achieved much, while much more of course remains to be done on the multilateral security agenda. Among the CD's successes are Treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test Ban. Despite some perceived shortcomings, these Treaties constitute quite impressive achievements. They demonstrate the validity, viability and the efficacy of the multilateral negotiating process. The Conference has also expanded its membership. It has thus become a more broad-based negotiating forum befitting the title, the single multilateral negotiating body of the United Nations on Disarmament. Significantly, the CD has managed all that despite a period of transition and flux marked by an evolving international security landscape of the post cold war period.

However, with all these achievements to its credit, the CD, it seems, is still endeavouring to define its mission. While no one expects the CD to produce a treaty every Session, it seems to go through excessive institutional pains year after year, trying to do the obvious - namely to start real work. Admittedly, this year's pains may be less excruciating than last year's but we are into the second month of the Session, without much serious dialogue, let alone negotiations even on what any reasonable person would call marginal issues.

This is happening despite an impressive array of proposals on the table on priority issues. Some of these priority issues seem to have fossilised in time and space from the time I saw them over a decade ago. Arguments in favour of no work on them ring familiar. Although the cold war nuclear rationale, if one ever existed, has ceased to exist in the real world, the doctrinal utility of nuclear weapons has been re-invented, refined and sustained. This business as usual approach can perhaps prevail, if the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) have to contend only with nuclear weapons reductions to be managed among themselves. But, so long as security remains nuclearised and security order entrenched in a continuum of non-proliferation-disarmament, everyone must face the imperative of multilateral work leading to nuclear disarmament on a longer term perspective. The nuclear capable countries outside the existing treaty regimes have clearly stated that they would discuss non-proliferation-disarmament issues only in a context of multilateral nuclear disarmament. The reality the NWS must face is that further inaction on CD Agenda item one will

undermine the outcome of the 1995 NPT Conference. We must not lose sight of the fact that the 1995 document advocates, inter-alia, a multilateral process for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. Regrettably, the CD's priority agenda on this score has remained largely unrealised. This is evidently not due to any structural or other institutional deficiency inherent in the CD but a matter of political will. The CD can only do what its member States want it to do, no more and no less.

We however do not believe that the CD need be overwhelmed by the current paralysis of its nuclear agenda. The order of priorities for the disarmament agenda in its nuclear and conventional dimensions have been quite clear from the time even of the first special session on disarmament in 1978. The letter and spirit of the 1995 NPT conference outcome reaffirmed it. We do not think it is helpful to replay that debate in order to side-track these priorities. What we would advocate is to proceed with realism and despatch based on the reality of the consensus rule to address those priority issues. We do see opportunities for some action on many issues including on Agenda Item One. The good atmosphere that prevails in the CD from the outset of the 1998 session should be capitalised on to seize such opportunities. If this is not achieved and the CD continues to file nil reports to the General Assembly for successive years, the resultant credibility loss would not serve anybody's interest.

We think that this cannot be and need not be the case. You and your predecessor, Mr President, correctly called some substantive work on Agenda Item One as being pivotal to progress in the CD this year. But the problem is that some see 'nothing but fissile material' work under item one. Equally, an approach of 'anything but fissile material' under item one would not help either. Fortunately no one has a rigid stance on the latter. Hence we see a mainstream view that could potentially point towards a two-track work method under item one if we can agree on an Ad Hoc Committee or a similar mechanism - a mechanism which can address real substance, not a proforma institution.

There is a broad range of proposals under item one on the table. We need to develop a constructive negotiating stance on these proposals in informal consultations through your good offices. We need not pursue diversionary arguments. Instead we need to respond to the proposals on the table. For example, we do not have to debate whether the CD should supplant bilateral nuclear arms reductions talks. No one has suggested that. It would be unrealistic and counter-productive for anyone to suggest it. On the other hand, bilateral and multilateral processes enrich each other as they seek the same objective on different time scales and in different negotiating environments. They had done so in the past. During the Chemical Weapons (CW) negotiations in the CD there were parallel bilateral, and at times, pluri-lateral processes under way between the major CW possessors. One did not undermine the other. On the contrary, they supported each other. In the same vein, bilateral draft text on chemical weapons was enriched, enhanced and developed into an unprecedented instrument of unique intrusiveness through a multilateral

process. It is time for us to put aside the argument of mutual exclusiveness.

What then can the CD do on Agenda Item One? There is consensus in the international community and we presume that the CD is a party to it - on the desirability of a long term process leading to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. That objective was most forcibly affirmed in the 1995 Conference. A road map for reaching that objective which is by definition a multilateral one, was also developed in the form of objectives and principles of nuclear disarmament. No one believes that a CD Ad Hoc Committee can or should proceed to immediate negotiations on any nuclear arms reduction. Such simplification would be naive. There is, nevertheless, a sufficient database to begin talks on talks, as it were, on a framework under which the shared objective of the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons can be pursued. Constructively ambiguous words of the South African proposal, which we think is yet another good attempt towards compromise, seeks to capture one way of doing that albeit at a lower common factor. We think the time has come for the CD to take at least a tentative step towards this deliberative process. Further delay to take meaningful measures would certainly vitiate the atmosphere for the NPT Review process, the preparations for which we will be commencing this April.

With regard to the CD's role in discussing a Fissile Material Treaty, Sri Lanka stated its position as far back as 1980. My delegation has since supported a comprehensive regime on fissile material production and use in the context of a multilateral nuclear disarmament process. We considered then, as we do now, such a regime as one of the most important barriers against more nuclear weapons and new nuclear weapon States.

Mr President,

Beyond the nuclear agenda, there are other important issues as well on the table. We hope these will bring about better results than they had last year.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is an agenda item which is clearly under utilised. We sincerely hope that an Ad Hoc Committee can be established on this. Further inaction on this item will run the risk of rolling back the good work done earlier. The past Ad Hoc Committees have produced an impressive repertoire of technical knowledge on the existing regime relevant to outer space as well as the inadequacies of that regime.

Outer space has become important to every country. The launch capabilities have spread fast. Space assets have become strategic interests for the major space powers and development assets for the developing countries. Protection of these assets is the common interest of all countries. Some may feel that these assets can be protected by weapons. Others feel this can be done by legal instruments. In the CD, we in our collective wisdom have opted to protect space assets not by lethal weapons but by legal weapons. This is the essence of Agenda Item Three - i.e. to ensure the prevention of weaponisation

of space. If we fail to do it now, given the spreading launch capability, we will be talking about non-proliferation in outer space in some years down the road.

It seems eminently sensible therefore to use a multilateral forum like the CD to prevent the introduction of weapons into outer space. We regret that an Ad Hoc Committee, which we had in the past on this item, has not been able to resume its work. We, nevertheless, agree to the President's suggestion that a Coordinator be appointed to seek ways and means to re-examine the Ad Hoc Committee's mandate. Hopefully, the Committee can begin its work with a mandate adjusted to common interests and current realities in outer space.

Mr President,

My delegation shares the view of those members who believe that the CD can and should address conventional disarmament issues as well. Sri Lanka has never been hesitant to address this important question despite the fact that naturally, the work on nuclear disarmament remained a high priority. Sri Lanka has actively contributed to the formulation and the functioning of the UN Arms Register under the TIA regime. We will continue to do so, although we share the view that the arms control value of the Register cannot be over-rated. An issue in this field that demands urgent multilateral action is the phenomenon of illicit arms trade, which is driving so many conflicts in various parts of the world. We recognize that this issue is being looked at by a United Nations Expert Group, which will make a further study this year. We nevertheless believe that this should not preclude an exchange of views or similar exploratory work in the CD. Deliberative work in New York and exploratory work in this negotiating body are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the expanded CD represents a reservoir of governmental views which can serve as inputs to the ongoing work by the Expert Group in New York. We need this parallel process, particularly on illicit arms, because the problem is urgent or even acute.

The former Secretary-General of the UN warned the international community against what he described as the 'supra-national subversive threat to peace and security' within and among states. This threat emanates from the nexus between illicit arms traders, drug traffickers and terrorists. They mutually feed each other in a vicious cycle, the consequences of which are all too clear in many parts of the world, particularly in the developing countries resulting in death and destruction. As the CD and the UN begin to address the security agenda of an emerging era, it cannot shut its eyes to this growing problem. What is more disturbing is that the international community has not yet been able to ascertain the magnitudes involved in the illicit arms trade, let alone control it. We look forward to the research work undertaken by UNIDIR and other organizations. One should not be deterred by the view that the illicit arms trade is a law and order problem to be tackled by the countries concerned. The reality is quite different though. The same argument was advanced some years ago against the advocacy of international action to counter drug

trafficking. However, drug trafficking and terrorism are now squarely on the international agenda as these are problems which require international cooperation to deter, prevent and counter. Similarly, the illicit arms trade needs international surveillance and cooperation. Measures and legal norms should be developed to support and shape State practice to this end. Given the fabric of conflict scenarios around the world, it is none too soon to take action. We, therefore, support those delegations which have flagged this issue for work in the CD.

On the issue of land mines, Sri Lanka, although not yet a party to the Ottawa Treaty, has welcomed its adoption in principle and is considering its accession when the security situation permits us to do so. We appreciate the humanitarian objective of a comprehensive regime against the full cycle of the anti-personnel land mines. Although we ourselves share most of the concerns raised regarding whether the CD can do anything useful in addition to the comprehensive existing regime on these weapons, we have an open mind with regard to the appointment of a Coordinator to ascertain the views of the delegations within the CD. We only hope that similar flexibility would be manifest on other agenda items as well.

Mr President,

As we search for ways forward on substance, the CD must come to terms with one reality. That is, that in the final analysis, it must show to the international community and to the world public opinion in particular, that there is a negotiating forum where common concerns about the world security order and the world nuclear agenda can be articulated. The CD must also project the impression that this participation denotes not an academic value but a negotiating value. That is vital, since the security issues like many others in the contemporary world have become truly globalized, touching upon the lives of everybody. True enough, the major powers have undertaken a noteworthy programme of arms reduction. They have shown that viable and stable arms reduction is possible. It is now time to demonstrate that some work is possible and desirable at the multilateral level on nuclear matters as well as on a range of other arms control issues. The treaty commitments enshrined in various arms control and disarmament instruments require such a broad-based approach. A beginning can be made with at least very tentative steps to commence this work on priority issues. That would perhaps be the occasion which the Ambassador of Ireland described as a 'defining moment' for the CD this year. We must make the CD use that opportunity rather than lose it. Yet another nil report to the General Assembly will indeed raise questions about the CD's cost-effectiveness.

Thank you.