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PERMANENT MISSION OF SRI LANKA

GENEVA

S T A T E M E N T

by the

PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

OF THE

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

to the

753RD PLENARY MEETING

OF THE

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

30 January 1997.

Mr President,

Allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Representing as you do Mr President, the Republic of Korea, a country with which Sri Lanka maintains most cordial ties of friendship and cooperation, you can count upon my delegation's full support in the discharge of the onerous duties cast upon you by the presidency of the Conference. May I also take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Dembinski, your immediate predecessor, for bringing the 1996 Session of the Conference to a successful conclusion.

May I, on behalf of my delegation, extend a warm welcome to our new colleagues who have recently joined the Conference, namely, the Ambassadors of Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Mongolia and Venezuela.

The year 1997 is full of promise for all of us. It also presents new challenges in the field of international peace and security. Maintaining international peace and security was amongst driving forces that compelled the establishment of the United Nations Organization 51 years ago. Arms limitation and disarmament thus became the cornerstone of the United Nations' agenda for peace and security.

Harking back upon the activities of the Conference on Disarmament based on an annual agenda derived from the so-called disarmament decalogue of the late 70's, one finds that much has been achieved since but that much more remains to be realized. It is appropriate here to remind ourselves that the decalogue itself is a direct outcome of the United Nations First Special Session Devoted to Disarmament (SSOD I) which, among other things, recognized the CD as the "single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum". Against this background, we understand and appreciate the position taken by some members that any change in the CD's agenda should be preceded by high political level consideration of the matter.

Mr President,

The CD's most recent contribution in the field of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was the conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT) late last year. The CTBT has already attracted a majority of the UN membership as its signatories. A major step in the direction of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which is enhanced by the indefinite extension of the NPT nearly 2 years ago, the CTBT should serve as yet another stepping stone leading to **nuclear disarmament**. Nuclear disarmament per se has assumed importance of the highest order calling for urgent action, on the one hand, for total elimination of the existing stockpiles of nuclear weapons and for prohibition of the development or acquisition of materials required to build such weapons, on the other. Towards this objective my delegation will seek the early establishment of an appropriate mechanism,

preferably an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament within the CD. Twenty-eight delegations of the 61-member Conference have, on 7 August 1996, proposed a programme of action for the elimination of nuclear weapons. This proposal and any other proposals on the subject may be examined by the Conference with a view to agreeing upon a mandate and a programme of work for the proposed mechanism.

Mr President,

A **fissile material cut-off treaty** (FMCT) is our next priority. The Ad Hoc Committee which was set up in pursuance of the Shannon report (CD 1299 of 24 March 1995) should be reactivated which, inter alia, would take into account the existing stocks of fissile material. Although Sri Lanka has no difficulty in agreeing to commence work of the Ad Hoc Committee immediately, we realize that there should be an understanding on the full range of items to be dealt with by this body in 1997.

Mr President,

Of extreme importance to my delegation is the question of **security assurances** - both negative and positive. Nothing short of a multilaterally negotiated, and legally binding agreement will fulfil this urgent and most pressing need of the non-nuclear weapon States. It is to be recalled that the Decision on Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament of the NPT R & E Conference of 1995 concluded that further steps should be considered to assure non-nuclear weapon States party to the Treaty against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Sri Lanka, therefore, strongly supports the call made by some members for the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on Negative Security Assurances.

Mr President,

My delegation firmly believes in the importance of maintaining the **outer space** as a weapons-free environment. While recognizing the fact that the arms race in that environment which existed during the cold war era has given way to cooperation for peaceful exploration of outer space in the recent past, we recognize the need to ensure that outer space will never again be used for deployment of space-based weapon-systems. It is, therefore, important for the Conference to begin consideration of an international agreement that would prevent weaponization of outer space. Towards this end the Conference would do well to re-establish its Ad Hoc Committee on Outer Space with an appropriate mandate to commence negotiations.

Mr President,

My delegation has taken note of the developments since the First Review Conference of the States parties to the CCW that concluded in Geneva, May 1996. We have observed the further strengthening of the 1980 Convention

by means of an Amended Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices (Amended Protocol II), and the addition of "Protocol on Blinding Laser Weapons (Protocol IV)".

These developments clearly illustrate that action has been and is being pursued in the appropriate forum by the States party to the treaty. Parallel to such measures, actions have also been pursued by interested countries in their quest for a global ban on **anti-personnel landmines** (APLs). These give rise to implications for the current Convention itself as well as for the Conference on Disarmament, with the latter being approached with a view to securing its services to conclude an international agreement banning anti-personnel mines. It has even been suggested, perhaps for the first time, that the CD ought to undertake such a task complementing the work that is being done elsewhere by interested parties.

Mr President,

My delegation has taken note of the CCW review process that was under way since January 1995, and concluded in Geneva last May. The States party to the Convention in their wisdom went to the farthest possible extent in order to strengthen and enhance the treaty regime by adopting an Amended Protocol II.

My delegation also notes that there was overwhelming support at the 51st UNGA for an international agreement designed to ban anti-personnel land mines. The views expressed by national delegations on the subject were indeed of a wide range extending from humanitarian, national security, self defence to legal considerations. These views cannot and should not be ignored, for they concerned specific interests of the individual member States.

However, Mr President, the Conference has to reach a consensus on whether or not the CD is the appropriate forum to negotiate such an agreement. Given the positions taken by some delegations on this question, it would, no doubt, take a great deal of friendly persuasion, in order that a decision be taken by the CD on this issue. So far as Sri Lanka is concerned, my delegation would take a flexible position on the question whether the proposed agreement should be negotiated within the CD or outside it, our cardinal consideration being the substance of the agreement rather than its negotiating forum.

If the past experiences of CD's negotiating process and its working methods are an index, my delegation is of the view that setting a deadline would run the risk of being counter-productive. We must bear in mind that the Conference will have to take into account the various positions taken by the delegations in this Chamber as well as at the UNGA. Equally important is the need to balance our priorities and apportion the time available to the CD for fulfilling the tasks entrusted to the Conference to be completed in the course of its current session.

Finally, Mr President, as I said at the beginning of my statement, in this year of promise and challenge, there is bound to be many a peril, if we fail to see the wood from the trees. We have to carefully choose our priorities taking into consideration our capabilities and limitations, so that we could decide on how best to utilize our hard pressed and meagre resources to advantage. In determining the 1997 agenda for the Conference we need to tread slowly but steadily, not abandoning our time-honoured objectives, while at the same time not failing to take into account the sea change that has overtaken inter-State relations in the final decade of this century, thus necessitating the community of nations to take a fresh look at their own peace and security agenda.

If the Conference were to satisfy all of its members, it would end up with Ad Hoc Committees on Nuclear Disarmament, Negative Security Assurances, Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, Transparency in Armaments, Anti-Personnel Land Mines and several other subjects. While that may be an ideal situation, we have to admit the fact that such an arrangement will not be practical due to time constraints of the Conference, and personnel problem faced by individual delegations including my own. It is, therefore, necessary for us to agree upon a realistic and a balanced work programme bearing in mind the fact that the CD is a negotiating forum and not a forum for deliberation.

Past experience tells us that the CD can quite effectively negotiate one item at a time. If we stretch ourselves, may be two but certainly not more than three items. It is from that point of view that we have to approach the work programme for 1997.

There are several proposals for the Agenda/Work Programme of the CD, including the one submitted by you in your capacity as President of this Conference. Sri Lanka favourably views the division of our work into -

- (a) Nuclear Weapons, and
- (b) Conventional Weapons.

With regard to nuclear weapons, in 1995 we had agreed to establish an Ad Hoc Committee on FMCT and done some work in the past on NSA under an Ad Hoc Committee established for that purpose. In the circumstances, there should be no difficulty in agreeing on the establishment of one or both these Ad Hoc Committees. With regard to Nuclear Disarmament, my delegation would like to ascertain the reaction of the members of the CD to the draft proposal submitted by the Group of 21 for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament contained in document No. CD/1388 of March 14, 1996. Sri Lanka, however, accepts the fact that some ground work has to be done before the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee. Initially, this function could be entrusted to a mechanism to be established for that purpose, which could, inter alia, determine the role CD can be entrusted with in the field of Nuclear Disarmament.

On the other side of the scale is conventional weapons. Sri Lanka is not in a position at present to suggest what specific ad hoc committee should be established to deal with conventional weapons. We would like to leave this to be decided by the Conference. If we can decide on a work programme on the above lines, I am certain that the CD will be able to commence its work soon. If not, the Conference will continue to grope in the dark for many weeks to come.

Let us, therefore, Mr President, decide to include in the current session's programme of work only those high priority items for negotiating, allowing the decalogue to remain on the agenda for the present until such time as the international community is able to focus on it in an appropriate manner.

Thank you, Mr President.