STATEMENT OF SRI LANKA AT THE TWENTY- SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CWC
BY H.E. MR A.M.J. SADIQ, AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SRI LANKA TO THE OPCW

Mr Chairman,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, allow me to extend warm felicitations to you, Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, on your election as the Chairperson of the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. I am confident that under your astute guidance, the deliberations of this Conference will lead to a successful conclusion.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to Ambassador Dr Christoph Israng of Germany for his able stewardship and wise counsel during the previous Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I also want to commend the Chair of the Executive Council, Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal of Bangladesh for his skillful and dynamic leadership in conducting the affairs of the Council, and in particular, overseeing the election process of the new Director General-designate of the OPCW, in a fair and transparent manner.

This session, being the last CSP that H.E. Ahmet Üzümcü is attending as Director General, I would like to convey our sincere thanks and appreciation to him for his outstanding and inspiring leadership over the past seven years, in steering the activities of the OPCW toward the cherished goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Sri Lanka strongly supports the nomination of Ambassador Fernando Arias of Spain by the Executive Council as the next Director-General, which we hope would be unanimously endorsed by this august body. We are confident that the innate professionalism, diplomatic skills and personal charm of Ambassador Arias would serve him in good stead to take on the challenging task of guiding the destiny of the OPCW from next year.

My delegation aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the distinguished Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Her Excellency Ambassador Haifa Aissami Madah, on behalf of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China.

Mr. Chairman,

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which established the OPCW. During the last two decades, the OPCW has facilitated the near universal disarmament of an entire class of a weapon of mass destruction. This makes the Chemical Weapons Convention the most successful international disarmament treaty in the world. With currently 96 percent of declared chemical weapon stockpiles verifiably destroyed, under the supervision of the OPCW, this 20th anniversary marks another milestone in the global endeavour to free the world of chemical weapons.

Since the establishment of the OPCW, there have been major positive developments of economic and geo-political significance in Asia, Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean. Today, around 84% of the world population and 73 % of Member States of the OPCW belong to these regions.

Given the rapid industrialisation, especially of developing countries over the last two decades, the importance of chemical industry has also substantially increased in these regions. In order to better prepare this organization for the future, we believe that attention must not only be paid to the growing need for assistance and resources in capacity building, but also to the under-representation of Asia, Africa, Latin America & the Caribbean in the executive body of the OPCW.

In this context, we wish to highlight the urgent need to review the composition of the Executive Council, to better reflect the geographical distribution, the importance of chemical industry, and the political and security interests of Member States in the contemporary world. It is also essential that regional groups formulate rules or guidelines, based on the principle of rotation to ensure that all Member States have equitable opportunities to serve on this important body.

Mr. Chairman,

In strengthening the future role of the OPCW as an efficient and effective disarmament organisation, my delegation commends the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities, under the able leadership of Co-Chairs, H.E. Sabine Nölke, Ambassador of Canada and H.E. Bruce Koloane, Ambassador of South Africa. We are confident that the Working Group will formulate a balanced, well focused programme of work and methods, to be taken up at the Fourth Review Conference next year.

Sri Lanka firmly believes that chemicals should only be used for peaceful purposes. The full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of all provisions of the Convention, including Article XI, is vital to avoid hampering the economic or technological development of States Parties. In this context, we would appreciate if the ideas shared during last week's "Review and Evaluation Workshop on the Components of an Agreed Framework for the Full Implementation of Article XI" could be taken into consideration by the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities and presented at the Fourth Review Conference.

My delegation underlines the importance of countering terrorism and believes that the ongoing discussions in the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism under the able stewardship of H.E. Momar Diop of Senegal, and at the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors under the guidance of H.E. María Teresa Infante of Chile, would lead to practical recommendations to address the threats of chemical terrorism.

The shifting security landscape in which we witness the rise of non-State actors demands our full attention. As highlighted in the Working Group discussions, the strengthening of capabilities of States Parties is crucial to address this rapidly evolving phenomenon. In this regard, the capability of non-State actors to manufacture and use chemical weapons underscores the need for the full and effective implementation of Article VII and must be addressed as a future priority of this organization.

Mr Chairman,

Sri Lanka believes that the Technical Secretariat should assist States Parties which already have national legislation implemented to review and upgrade their existing national measures in keeping with current developments. Technical assistance and support for such measures should be provided through tailor-made programmes, following a careful study of the needs of States Parties, since one size does not fit all.

Sri Lanka wishes to highlight the crucial need for international cooperation and assistance in the areas of verification and capacity building. In this context, we welcome the participation of National Authorities in capacity building programs, but we reiterate the importance of having a thorough and rigorous review and evaluation by the Technical Secretariat at the end of each program. We believe that the success of capacity building programs largely depends on the effective functioning and commitment of National Authorities themselves.

Sri Lanka attaches importance to the strengthening of national capacities in chemical emergency responses. I am pleased to note that the National Authority of Sri Lanka, with the assistance of the OPCW, conducted the 5th Regional Basic Training Course on Emergency Response to Chemical Incidents in Colombo from 6th to 10th February this year. This course was attended by 37 participants from various agencies in the region, with the objective of providing participants adequate training on civil defence, civil protection, and decontamination operations in contaminated areas and counter-measures in the event of incidents involving chemical warfare agents or toxic industrial chemicals.

Further, as a part of the 18th edition of the OPCW Associate Programme under the industry segment, a Sri Lankan company, Camso Loadstar (Pvt) Ltd, together with the National Authority of Sri Lanka, for the third consecutive year, trained two participants from Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the Russian Federation for completing the destruction of its entire declared stockpile of chemical weapons, which is a significant victory for the entire international community.

Sri Lanka also warmly welcomes the completion of the destruction of Libya's remaining Category 2 Chemical Weapons and commends the Technical Secretariat and all other associated States Parties and organisations for their support and assistance in this process.

Further, Sri Lanka calls upon States still in possession of chemical weapons to take all necessary steps, without any further delay, to expedite the destruction of their declared chemical weapons stockpiles, old chemical weapons and abandoned chemical weapons, since the existence of such chemical weapons continues to pose a threat to global security.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone and anywhere, irrespective of circumstances, is reprehensible and completely contrary to the provisions of the Convention and all norms of international law. In this regard, our delegation takes note of the findings in the 7th Report of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism relating to Syria.

In conclusion, I would like to request that this Statement be considered as an official document of this Conference and posted on the OPCW website and extranet.

Thank you.