



**Statement by Mr. Sugeeshwara Gunaratna,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka
at the
77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
General debate of the First Committee**

Mr. Chairman,

I take this opportunity to congratulate you and the bureau on your election and assure you of our support in carrying out our deliberations in a productive manner. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and wishes to stress the following in our national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

May I begin rather euphemistically, by saying that we live in a world of great uncertainties. There is perhaps nothing more certain. These uncertainties are in manifold ways our own creation. The continued environmental destruction of the planet; the pandemic that we seem have

to have managed at great cost but yet not totally overcome; an international financial system that as the UN Secretary General himself put it - "morally bankrupt" and either unable or unwilling to move rapidly to help countries out of the economic and financial crises they face; and a cyber space that is unregulated and is fast becoming a threat to our own collective security and stability. In short, the First Committee of the UN, designated with the task of deliberating on matters of international security and disarmament meets at a time where there is undoubtedly diminished security for all. Added to this toxic mix, is the continued lack of progress in nuclear disarmament, the threat posed by Lethal and Autonomous Weapons, the threat of weaponization and an arms race in outer space and the continued proliferation of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons making it one of the most lucrative of trades. The global disarmament and arms control architecture continues to face severe threats that call into question the bona fides of all major players involved.

It is precisely at a juncture such as this that, we need to be cognizant and act upon the new challenges that are ahead of the multilateral system and take effective steps to address the risks and reinvigorate global cooperation, making effective advances toward a safer world. We underline the importance and relevance of the UN Disarmament Commission as a deliberative body empowered to consider current challenges to global disarmament and submit recommendations to the General Assembly. We welcome the deliberations this year with the adoption by consensus of the texts of the two Working Groups. We recall with pride that it was under Sri

Lanka's chairmanship of the NAM that a resolution was introduced that led to the First Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD) in 1978. We also emphasize the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole, multilateral negotiating body on disarmament and underscores the vital necessity for it to settle down to its substantive task of negotiation of disarmament treaties.

Mr. Chairman,

On the subject of nuclear disarmament, modernizing of nuclear arsenals, and conducting research and development of new nuclear warheads and delivery systems, while singing hosannas for nuclear risk reduction, seem to be the reality that we are confounded with as witnessed during the 10th NPT Review Conference with the first pillar of the NPT namely nuclear disarmament being relegated to the background. Sri Lanka has consistently welcomed any multilateral and bilateral effort towards nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It is only fair to state that non-proliferation and disarmament are mutually reinforcing and, one derives legitimacy and credibility from the other. Pursuing non-proliferation while ignoring nuclear disarmament creates two clubs of 'nuclear haves' and 'nuclear have-nots' and therefore is not sustainable. Given the current status of imbalance and the threat faced by non-nuclear weapon states, it is only fair to call for negotiations to begin on a legally binding treaty on negative security assurances for non-nuclear weapon states.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka has been a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention since 1993. It is today a comprehensive multilateral treaty delegitimizing a complete category of Weapons of Mass Destruction, with a verification system and provisions for the promotion of chemicals for peaceful purposes. We regret the non-adoption of the report of the 4th Special Session of the Conference of State Parties to review the operation of the convention owing to lack of consensus and politicization of issues.

Sri Lanka reiterates that any use of chemical weapons is a complete disregard of humanity, reprehensible and contrary to the provisions of the convention as well as any accepted legal norm. It is imperative that full universality of the convention is achieved.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka also believes that it is the sovereign right of all states to explore and use outer space for exclusively peaceful purposes. The threat of the weaponization of outer space and an arms race in outer space should be prevented as it threatens the very existence of modern living. In this regard, it is also imperative that the current legal regime concerning the use of outer space be strengthened. We welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to hold a multi stakeholder dialogue on Outer Space as part of the Summit of the Future. Sri Lanka is committed to the fundamental principles

of the Outer Space Treaty. Sri Lanka and Egypt have together presented a resolution to this Committee for four decades now on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. We hope that this year as well the resolution will continue to enjoy your wide support as in previous years.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, threats posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons remain, contributing to continued availability of weapons in the hands of non-state actors. While Sri Lanka takes note of the achievement of concrete outcomes during the 08th Biennial Meeting of the States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all Its Aspects, it hopes that the commitments made during the meeting will contribute to establishing a normative framework for small arms control. As a country that experienced a three decade conflict that was brought to an end in 2009, Sri Lanka is a first-hand witness to the senseless destruction caused due to illicit trade of small arms and light weapons.

Mr.Chairman

Exemplifying the strong commitment by the Government of Sri Lanka and the significant progress that has been achieved so far to de-mine previous conflict affected areas in the country, Sri Lanka joined the Committee on

Article 5 Implementation (mine clearance) of the Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention covering the period 2021 and 2022 and will work alongside other countries in the Committee to support state parties in their implementation efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

With ongoing instabilities in international security and mounting evidence of autonomous weapons systems being used in contemporary conflicts, an agreed international legal framework is urgently needed to safeguard against the serious ethical, legal, humanitarian and security risks posed by autonomous weapons systems. It is in recognition of this threat that the UN Secretary-General in 'Our Common Agenda' report, calls for states to "establish internationally agreed limits" on autonomous weapons systems. Sri Lanka, having initiated State level discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems during its Presidency of the CCW encourages the GGE process and hopes that the report and its recommendations will be adopted by the CCW High Contracting Parties at its meeting in November 2022 and that states will work towards prohibitive and regulatory limitations on use of autonomous weapon systems. Mr. Chairman, it is bad enough that we are compelled to discuss ways to prevent humans from killing each other but automation of the process would amount to an abdication of the little humanity that remains in the laws of war and surely repugnant to the principles of the UN Charter that discourages war, promotes peace and preserves human rights.

Mr. Chairman

As the cyber threats landscape continues to grow and expand, Sri Lanka recognizes that the equitable global digital transition requires meeting contemporary challenges inclusive of digital governance. We believe that collaborative efforts through institutional dialogues and confidence-building measures can promote an open, secure, stable, accessible, and peaceful ICT environment for the world. Sri Lanka welcomes the deliberations of the OEWG on the Security of and in the use of ICTs as well as the Ad hoc Committee established to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes. We hope that these deliberations will lead to its logical, productive outcomes.

Mr. Chairman,

We live in a time where human development globally has declined during the last two years and realization of the 2030 Agenda increasingly looks very far away. Needless to say, since the global military expenditure is around USD 2 trillion, a diversion of expenditure from military to crucial economic and social development can be a game-changer in our efforts to create a safe, healthy and peaceful planet.

Thank you.