

Statement by Ambassador A.L.A. Azeez, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka at the High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament, 26 February 2019

It is indeed an honour, Mr. President, to join the distinguished speakers, who have addressed the High Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament yesterday and today. These distinguished speakers, including His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, have spoken so eloquently, drawing our attention to the importance of achieving swift progress in the critical area of disarmament.

Mr. President,

The security landscape in most regions, as well as globally in general, is becoming increasingly constrained by the day. It is timely to reflect on some of the trends and developments in the international security landscape, and to seek to persuade the parties or forces that shape them, to take all possible steps in the direction of assuring and strengthening international peace and security. We say this in good faith.

- The Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) is in jeopardy. We would encourage dialogue between the States concerned, on INF. We also echo the call made by the Secretary General to extend the New START Treaty for another term, from when it is due to expire.

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was welcomed by a large number of countries as it was concluded in 2015. We note the importance of continuing to honour the JCPOA by all its current parties, and the IAEA's crucial role in verification.

- The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, which was the last treaty negotiated by the CD, before its final adoption, has come a long way in achieving near-universality, but remains still short of essential ratifications to come into effect. We appreciate the Preparatory Commission of CTBTO and its Executive Secretary for the innovative

ways in which they use the treaty provisions to benefit humanity, in vital areas of its mandate.

- The use, or threat of use of other types of Weapons of Mass Destruction remains still a possibility. The perception being created that the use of nuclear weapons is less of a possibility today than that of other WMDs is just what it is; perception. It seems evident that confidence among non-nuclear weapons states in the continued wisdom of non-use or in the ability of restraint is steadily eroding.

- The evolving prospect of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), with advances made in Artificial Intelligence dominating regional and global security landscapes, devoid of meaningful human control, remains a matter of grave concern. Implications of such weapons systems for human rights and international humanitarian law are far-reaching.

- While several regions have their own nuclear weapons-free zones and take responsible measures to ensure that intra-regional peace and security holds despite challenges, such arrangements, however, appear to be a luxury for a few others. Now, the concept has even expanded to include all other Weapons of Mass Destruction. The 1995 NPT Review and Extension package remains unimplemented in most areas that it contains, and one of the most glaring is the lack of commitment to move forward towards negotiating a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East.

These are, however, only a few, and several other challenges that have the potential to place humanity at peril still remain, and they are too numerous to be recounted here.

Mr. President,

It is in the backdrop of this constraining global landscape that we have stepped into the year 2019. This year, though, marks several landmarks in the global disarmament discourse, including 100 years of multilateralism in disarmament, the 40th anniversary of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the final Preparatory Commission of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty (NPT), and the 20th anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC). We believe that there are other landmarks, too, directly or indirectly connected to disarmament and non-proliferation discourses. Some lie in the human rights arena, particularly the 70th anniversary of the UDHR, which we consider have relevance for the assurance of human security in all its aspects.

However, Mr. President, not everything is bleak, as several speakers have pointed out in this forum yesterday and today. On this point, we share the hope expressed by the Secretary General yesterday, which was to the effect that we should build on the positives and work harder on narrowing the differences that exist, in the common interest of humanity.

Having faced a continuing impasse for over 20 years, the CD received an impetus temporarily last year through its Decisions 2119 and 2126, providing an opportunity to break this stalemate and move forward. Substantive deliberations followed. Nevertheless, a major step forward is yet to be taken towards a Programme of Work agreeable to all. The 40th anniversary of the CD is the right opportunity, if used wisely, to build on the momentum achieved through the productive work in the last year, to develop an understanding of commonalities, and in parallel, or alongside, to progress towards negotiating a comprehensive and balanced Programme of Work.

In Sri Lanka's perspective, the launching of the 'Securing our common future: An Agenda for Disarmament' by the Secretary General of the United Nations in Geneva in May last year, marked a significant step forward. It called for a breakthrough in the current impasse and aimed to create forward movement in the disarmament agenda, through practical suggestions and ideas. There was great expectation that it would help bring the global focus back on disarmament in all its aspects, and put in place sustained, effective and meaningful processes to advance disarmament.

We are encouraged that several countries have taken ideas from the Secretary General's Agenda for Disarmament and have introduced, or are introducing specific multilateral initiatives. We hope they are doing so believing in the intrinsic value of such initiatives, as the

world is beset by a number of challenges, including new and emerging. While we note this positive approach, it is unfortunate, however, that some should have interpreted this 'Agenda' only from the perspective of their own strategic priorities, rather than seeing how best the ideas contained therein could cohere into making the policy and legal architecture for advancing disarmament and non-proliferation in a much more forward-looking manner.

We should endeavor to use the ideas to construct our collective approach for a better and safer world. We should refrain from seeking to reduce the Secretary General's Agenda for Disarmament to a book of beautiful quotes – for selective quotation to suit the specific stake that one or the other appears to maintain in the disarmament discourse.

Mr. President,

As much as we are pleased with the positive developments, so are we worried over the possibility of some critical ideas being neglected. While some ideas are taken from the Agenda for Disarmament in good faith, for transformation into multilateral initiatives, some ideas that the Agenda has suggested with a view to bridging the divides on some vital concerns, still remain 'unpicked'. We have a fear, therefore, that even though it does not amount to 'cherry-picking', the current emphasis on 'picking the pick-ables and leaving out the rest' may, in one way or the other, perpetuate the imbalance that already exists.

Considering the current precarious state of the international peace and security landscape, the significance of the year 2019 in the global disarmament calendar, and in particular, as we advance towards the 2020 NPT Review Conference, it is imperative that the CD explores all means possible to create momentum for serious and committed negotiations on all core issues. In this regard, we note with appreciation the efforts being made to seek the support of the CD membership to evolve a draft decision that would pave the way for substantive informal deliberations through subsidiary mechanisms, broadly on the lines of the decision adopted during Sri Lanka's Presidency last year, and building further on it and further narrowing the gaps in our understanding.

If swift progress is not achieved in the common interest of humanity towards engaging in substantive negotiations aimed at putting in place binding international instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation, the gains of multilateralism and its achievements in peace, security and social and economic development for all, could no doubt run the risk of being rolled back or negated for a long time to come.

We believe in 'enabling' or 'permissive' mechanisms as well as methods and procedures that yield outcomes. We consider that working methods and rules of procedure are there only to aid, not prevent, deliberations on substantive issues. Deliberations should, in turn, aid negotiations. The CD being the single disarmament negotiating forum, it is important that it is harnessed to better deliver on its core mandate and to take forward negotiations on all critical concerns.

We also believe it is important for the CD to be inclusive and representative enough of the whole range of views and perspectives expressed on critical issues in disarmament and non-proliferation. In this respect, we reiterate two factors that are essential to infuse fresh thinking and initiative, namely, (i) addressing the acute need for education and training in the disarmament and non-proliferation arena; and (ii) ensuring the full integration of a gender perspective into disarmament and non-proliferation discourses. We wish to urge the UNODA, UNIDIR and all Member States to strengthen their work in these areas, which are crucial to empowering the younger generation on disarmament, particularly in the developing world.

Mr. President,

Within the parameters of our national approach to international peace and security, the following remain among pre-eminent priorities in the disarmament arena:

- we stand for comprehensive disarmament, realized through a step by step approach, underpinned by the adoption of legally binding frameworks and also addressing legal gaps that may exist;
- We attach priority to full compliance with, and effective promotion of, the implementation of the NPT without further delay, and respect for its three pillars and

the delicate balance built into the structure of the treaty in favour of eventual achievement of nuclear disarmament;

- We support the preservation of all existing disarmament architecture and the positive gains realized;
- We continue to remain committed to achieving a legally binding instrument on PAROS, as a country which has steadfastly pursued the objective of an Outer Space free of weapons;
- We advance and promote respect for the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention and continue to call for their effective and non-discriminatory implementation;
- We strongly support and call for the effective implementation of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism;
- We call for practical steps towards establishing WMD-free zones, building upon the nuclear free zones that already exist, and, in particular, in regions where such zones are not in place, as confidence-building initiatives;
- We express commitment to, and call for negotiation on, a legally binding instrument on Negative Security Assurance.
- We maintain clear positions, diligently advancing humanitarian disarmament in all its aspects.

The list is not exhaustive, Mr. President, and the remaining set of priorities includes identification of and negotiation on new and emerging issues such as the LAWS.

Mr. President,

We are living in an increasingly inter-connected and inter-linked world. There is a direct link between development and security; security and human rights; and human rights and development. Lack of movement in these critical areas will severely impact progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Development, with many of the Sustainable Development Goals likely falling behind their targets and many others slipping into further

regression. SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 on Partnerships for Goals, in particular, are of paramount importance in this context, if we are to 'leave no one behind'.

The lead-up to 2020 is an important and critical period not only for the international landmarks that I mentioned, but because it provides an opportunity to take realistic stock of the implementation of the SDGs in the 2020 General Assembly review. Peace and security, that underpins and forms the basis for sustainable development and human rights, is a key determinant of the progress that humanity makes in all spheres including economic and social development.

Mr. President,

On behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, let me express our sincere wish that the proposal that is currently before this Conference, delicately worked on by you and your team, would no doubt take us steps closer to the path of achieving sustained global peace and security through disarmament and non-proliferation.

We would like to assure you, and through you, to all other delegations present here, Mr. President, that Sri Lanka remains ready and willing to support all efforts towards generating and achieving consensus within CD and working towards realizing its true objectives.

I thank you, Mr. President.