



# SRI LANKA

## STATEMENT

By

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**President of the UN Conference  
to Review the Progress made in the Implementation  
of the Programme Of Action to Prevent, Combat  
and Eradicate Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light  
Weapons in All Its Aspects**

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Madame Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the distinguished members of this Committee in my capacity as the President of the recently concluded Review Conference on 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. First, I like to extend my congratulations to you Madame Chairperson, on your election to guide the work of this Committee at this difficult and challenging juncture for disarmament in general, and non-proliferation, in particular.

As we meet in the wake of the 2006 Review Conference, this session of the First Committee no doubt will also focus on the outcome of the Conference. It is possible for member states to pick up from where we left in July and chart a course on the way forward to fully implement the Programme of Action, and even look beyond with a view to strengthening our global efforts.

Madame Chair:

We need to learn lessons from the Review Conference as to how we can contribute better in our struggle against the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons. I am happy therefore that I have now been given an opportunity to share some thoughts with you.

Yes, we are all disappointed that the Review Conference could not agree on an outcome document. But I think it would be a mistake if we allow this fact to devalue the broader positive impact of the Conference. Lack of a concrete outcome should not discourage us from pursuing full implementation of the Programme of Action at the national, regional and global levels with renewed vigor and determination. We should not overlook the fact that over 30% of the speakers in the General Debate of the Review Conference were high-level representatives, many of whom at the Ministerial level. A large number of civil society representatives and Parliamentarians were among the stakeholders at the Conference who contributed energetically to mainstream this issue at global level. A significant achievement at Conference was the overwhelming reaffirmation of the commitment to fully implement the Programme of Action by participating member states and other stakeholders.

Madame Chair,

When I accepted to preside over the work of the 2006 Conference, I was fully aware of the trials and tribulations of the task. I was handicapped by lack of progress on substantive issues at the Preparatory Committee Meeting of the Conference. Therefore, from the outset there was no apparent clarity on divergent views on substance as well as differing interpretation of the scope of the Conference. On one hand, a very large number of States adopted a "work-in-progress" view of the Programme of Action and perceived the Conference as an opportunity to strengthen the Programme Of Action through further agreements on several important issues that were left unresolved in 2001. On the other hand, some others preferred an approach that would limit the Conference to a straightjacket evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the agreed Programme of Action. The latter group seemed to argue that the Programme of Action was in its early stages of implementation or far

from being fully implemented and therefore, the focus of the Conference should be only to improve the Programme's implementation.

Faced with this challenge, it became important to undertake extensive consultations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in order to try and reconcile opposing approaches and begin a process of consensus-building way ahead of the Conference. Thus, in the period from March to May, I conducted several open-ended informal consultations and attended several regional and other meetings. Following these efforts, I developed a non-paper that in my perception, could serve as a basis for negotiations on a final outcome document of the Conference. Reflecting as much as possible the various inputs and views received from States, some of which were completely contradictory to one another, the non-paper evolved through several revisions during the consultation process leading up to the Conference. This non-paper was later adopted as a working paper by the Conference and thus available on record.

During this consultation process, it became clear that there was little or no chance for agreement on the two most contentious, but most-talked-about issues relevant to the substance of the Programme Of Action, which had been left out in 2001; Namely, the issue of controls on civilian possession and SALW transfers to non-State actors. However, on most other issues, I felt that if States could muster enough political will and flexibility the possibility exists to reach compromise. However, progress towards compromise remained slow and, despite an encouraging breakthrough - the emergence of a compromise on language concerning SALW transfer controls-in the end, it was not possible to overcome some differences. The Conference therefore, could not agree on a meaningful outcome document that would not diminish the pith and the substance of the Programme of Action and would contain recommendations for concrete measures to fully implement the Programme of Action with a clear road map for follow-up action, in particular at the global level.

Madame Chair,

There has been much discussion on reasons as to why it was not possible to conclude an outcome document. We need to look at a combination of factors, and let me point out some issues that in my view, may be useful for further reflection.

**First is the Current status of the multilateral disarmament agenda:** the SALW process is not immune to the malaise currently afflicting the multilateral disarmament efforts. Unless all Member States, particularly major powers, renew their confidence in the UN as a stage or a vehicle for addressing important disarmament issues at the global level and renew their commitment for global measures in multilateral fora, we are bound to see an increasing number of inconclusive UN disarmament meetings in the future;

**Second, is the failure to reach compromise on key unresolved issues:** 2001 Programme of Action was a manifestation of the resolve of the international community to address a burning and a real issue that was affecting a great number of countries and societies. The United Nations was expected to coordinate this effort at the global, regional and national level with the cooperation of all the stakeholders. However, the POA was adopted as a compromise and it was understood that all issues relevant to illicit small arms and light weapons were not included in the POA and, in particular some key issues were deliberately left out in 2001 for the sake of consensus. It was assumed by many at that time that the POA was a first step in the long road towards eliminating the proliferation of illicit small arms, world wide. Many agree that without addressing several issues such as the Non-State Actors, ammunition and civilian possession it will not be possible to adequately address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In this context, it is essential that the POA be understood as a living document subject to global dynamics that change with time, and therefore in need of review and strengthening in a forward looking manner to fully implement in all its aspects. The problem of illicit

trade in SALW can be handled meaningfully by the international community only if we all reckon that the POA cannot and should not be frozen in time.

**Third is the consensus "rule":** In the UN, as a matter of established practice, on issues that relate to national security of states, decisions are taken on the basis of consensus. The SALW issue became no exception to this understanding. However, consensus works best when all the parties genuinely seek compromise for the sake of common good and are willing to exercise flexibility in order to achieve results acceptable to an overwhelming and preponderant majority. In this context, the establishment of rigid redlines are certainly not conducive to achieving consensus. The practice adopted by some to insist on unanimity as consensus can lead to a veto on consensus-building process. I am convinced that a more judicious use of the consensus "rule" during the Review Conference and its preparatory process would have gone a long way towards on the conclusion of an outcome document.

Madam Chair,

The outcome of the Review Conference is not a reason for any discouragement. The Review Conference did not diminish the value and the palpable progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action. During the period since 2001, hundreds of thousands of weapons and ammunition have been destroyed, National Commissions have been established in over 80 countries, including in my country. States adopted an international instrument on SALW Marking and Tracing and we have made advances towards addressing the key issue of illicit brokering in SALW, which will be the object of a study by a Group of Governmental Experts that will commence its work next month. And most importantly, international community as a whole, has been made aware of the abominable effects of the illicit trade in small arms, and several states and societies are taking unilateral measures to curb this evil practice.

Madame Chair,

The road ahead is still quite long and arduous. We must keep our spirits high and persevere in our struggle to spare humanity from the threat of illicit small arms and light weapons. The elimination of this scourge will bring peace and tranquility to many countries, societies and neighbourhoods. We need to continue improving measures for the full implementation of the Programme of Action and also need to look beyond. And if we are to be effective in this regard, it is essential to have a mechanism, at the global level, to evaluate, in a transparent and cooperative manner, as to how States, regional and international organizations and civil society have embarked on implementing their commitments and agree at the global level to enhance international cooperation and assistance to enable all States to fulfill their commitments. The POA already envisages the need for periodic reviews in its implementation. Indeed the breadth and the substance of the debate, the mobilization of civil society and the media, the intensive preparatory process at national and international levels, in the period leading up and during the Review mechanism Meetings are, in themselves, important factors that keep the momentum alive and to manifest and sensitize international opinion. I am hopeful, therefore, that this Committee will seize the opportunity to agree on a mandate for such a forward looking mechanism.

In conclusion, let me recall the poignant words of Secretary-General at commencement of the Review Conference when he said that "These weapons may be small, but they cause mass destruction". And it is time we hear his words once again. Time is running out. Let us commit once again to all action possible to stop the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons from our midst, now.

Thank you.