



A D D R E S S

by

Hon. Tyronne Fernando P.C.
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka

to the

Conference on Disarmament

18th March, 2004

**Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the
United Nations, Geneva**

(check against delivery)

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Distinguished delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to address this unique forum, the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me at the outset, congratulate you Mr. President on your assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in your endeavors to guide this Conference.

It is our earnest desire to see that this year the Conference on Disarmament will reach consensus on its programme of work. In this regard, proposals submitted by the five Ambassadors are very useful and we must thank them for their untiring efforts. Sri Lanka fully supports these proposals.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka stands firmly against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons. Sri Lanka has always been supportive of complete and universal elimination of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament is of great concern to the entire international community. Lord Bertrand Russell wrote in 1961 and I quote "the probability of thermonuclear war occurring appears to be significantly larger than the probability of it not occurring" - unquote. It has not occurred for 53 years but it can happen tomorrow.

Sri Lanka, like many other nations, is concerned that there has been a slow progress made towards achieving nuclear disarmament. The nuclear weapon States have a major role to play in this regard.

My country, Sri Lanka, and Egypt introduce traditionally at the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, a resolution on the "prevention of an arms race in outer space". The resolution calls for the recommencement at the earliest of the stalled negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space at the Conference on Disarmament.

Sri Lanka supports the establishment of an ad hoc committee in the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a non-discriminatory and effectively verifiable multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, taking

into consideration both disarmament and nuclear non proliferation objectives.

Sri Lanka also supports the convening of the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and the proposal of the Secretary-General Kofi Annan to convene an international conference to focus on eliminating nuclear dangers.

We remain concerned on the lack of progress on the implementation of the commitments contained in the final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, in particular, the thirteen steps agreed upon to be taken by the Parties to the NPT. There is no room for complacency. Nigel Calder wrote in his book "Nuclear Nightmares" and I quote - "the Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Christoph Bertram, identifies as one of the worst consequences of proliferation the possibility that a minor power may benefit by using nuclear weapons against a neighbour. If it achieved its military and political objectives without the sky falling in, the taboo that has operated since Nagasaki would be broken and nuclear war could then come to be regarded as a practicable way of settling international disputes. But what about the contrary menace, of the small regional war growing into a nuclear world war?" - unquote.

Furthermore, pending the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Sri Lanka hopes that nuclear weapon States and nuclear weapon capable States would continue to maintain a moratorium on nuclear weapon test explosions.

Mr. President,

The threat of terrorism, both perceived and real, has already had an adverse impact not only on internal security of States, but also on international security relations. The danger that terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction no more remains in the realm of imagination as the world has already witnessed unprecedented devastating terrorist attacks in several countries. Therefore, all our multilaterally agreed conventions, frameworks and agreements such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and IAEA safeguards agreements should be put into full use in order to consolidate our common determination to fight against terrorism. The establishment of new nuclear-weapon-free zones would also contribute immensely to achieve this goal.

Mr. President,

Let me take this opportunity to outline briefly some of the important measures that have been taken in Sri Lanka in the field of conventional weapons.

Sri Lanka attaches great importance to the prevention, combating and eradication of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and actively participated at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects held in 2001 and the first biennial meeting of States held in 2003. The outcome of the 2001 Conference and, in particular, its Programme of Action, played a key role in promoting awareness on the issue among government agencies and civil society. Sri Lanka has almost completed the setting-up of a National Commission Against the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms.

Action is also being taken in Sri Lanka to formulate necessary national legislative measures in compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention to which Sri Lanka is a party. The proposed national legislation, once enacted, will impose legal control on imports and exports of certain chemicals referred to in the Convention.

Although Sri Lanka remains outside the Ottawa Convention on Anti-personnel Mines, it has always, in principle, supported the humanitarian objectives of this landmark international instrument. The Government of Sri Lanka has embarked on a comprehensive humanitarian mine action programme with a broad objective of making Sri Lanka a mine free country by the end of 2006. A National Steering Committee for Mine Action has been setup to coordinate this programme.

In his address to the 57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2002, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka stated that Sri Lanka was reviewing its position on the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines with a view to becoming a party to it as confidence in peace accrues.

Inter-Ministerial Consultations are being held to work towards Sri Lanka's accession to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, including its Amended Protocol-II on Landmines as a first step to fulfil Sri Lanka's commitment to address the issue of Landmines. We are also exploring the possibility of sharing information, as appropriate, under Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention.

Mr. President,

The creation of safe havens for individual or group of nations protected by weapons of mass destruction has become a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, we join those who reaffirm the efficacy of multilateral approaches as means of achieving greater security for all. In our view, multilateral measures, in particular on disarmament and security issues, by its inherent nature, favour dialogue over monologue, accommodation over domination, consultation over prescription and cooperation over confrontation. We strongly believe that individual as well as collective security needs and requirements are best met through multilateral measures as well as consultation processes that enjoy international legitimacy and support.

May the weapons of mass destruction "Rust In Peace" and let us bid a farewell to Arms.

Thank you.