

**Statement by Ambassador Sarala Fernando, Head of Delegation of  
Sri Lanka to the Conference on Disarmament during the General Debate  
16<sup>th</sup> May, 2006**

Mr. President,

Since this is the first time I am speaking under your Presidency, may I extend our greetings and convey sincere good wishes for every success. Although you did mention on 23<sup>rd</sup> March that your opening remarks had lost much of their traditional value due to the unprecedented P6 initiative, it could also be said that within this collective engagement, each President has his own important responsibility; during your tenure of office, this will include preparing and conducting the structured debate on FMCT. You also rightly reminded us that the debate takes place in the background of extensive early FMCT related consultations in the CD.

Many delegations have held that substantive work on agenda item 1 is pivotal to progress in the CD this year. We were encouraged by the good atmosphere that prevails in the CD from the outset of the 2006 session. The active participation of so many delegations in the debate on nuclear disarmament was a sign for optimism and signalled also continued all round support for the relevance of the Conference. We must ask ourselves, what can the CD do on agenda item 1? There is consensus in the international community and we presume the CD is a party to it, on the desirability of a long-term process leading to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. The time may have come for the CD to take at least a tentative step towards a deliberate process, talks about talks as it were on a framework under which the shared objective of the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons can be pursued.

As we search for ways forward on substance, the CD must come to terms with one reality. That is that, in the final analysis, it must show to the international community, and to world public opinion in particular, that there is a negotiating forum where common concerns about international security and the world disarmament agenda can be articulated. The CD must also project the

impression that this participation denotes not an academic value but a negotiating and treaty making value.

With regard to the CD's role in discussing a fissile material treaty, Sri Lanka stated its position as far back as 1980. My delegation has since supported a comprehensive international legal regime on banning fissile material production and use, negotiated and adopted as a part of the multilateral nuclear disarmament agenda. We considered then, as we do now, such a regime as one of the most important barriers against more nuclear weapons as well as new nuclear weapon States.

Beyond the nuclear agenda, there are other issues as well. The prevention of an arms race in outer space is an agenda item which is clearly under utilised; we need to build on the work done so far including the impressive repertoire of technical knowledge that emerged in the Adhoc Committee on PAROS. Outer space has become important to every country; the launch capabilities have spread fast. Space assets have become strategic interests for the major space powers and development assets for developing countries.

My delegation shares the view of those members who believe that the CD can and should address conventional disarmament issues as well. Sri Lanka has never been hesitant to address this important question despite the fact that, naturally, the work on nuclear disarmament remained a high priority. While the weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation are a continuing threat to human kind it is small arms that threaten most people in the conflict and war zones of today. The international community must continue all efforts to prevent the illicit transfers of SALW into the hands of non-state actors for use in violence and acts of terrorism. We welcome therefore the steady progress made in areas such as marking and tracing of SALW, and trust similar progress will be made in the future work on brokering. Sri Lanka is the first country in Asia to establish a National Commission against the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons as a clear manifestation of its deep commitment to implement the UNPOA on SALW adopted in 2001.