



**Statement by Hon. M.U.M. Ali Sabry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka
High Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament
Monday, 26 February 2024**

Mr. President
Madam Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I extend my felicitations to you Mr. President on assuming the Presidency of this Conference and assure you of my country's fullest support in carrying out the important work of this Conference.

I also appreciate the commitment and the untiring efforts of the Indian presidency that preceded, towards building consensus through open and broad consultations.

I am addressing this important body at a decisive time in human history. The need is more vital than ever, for effective disarmament diplomacy.

In the backdrop of prevailing complex geo-political tensions and threats to the global peace, security and stabilization, as well as the fast-emerging digital technologies, the need for the Conference on Disarmament to resume its substantive work is apparent. It is a matter of deep regret that for over more than two decades the CD has been deadlocked, preventing it from negotiating urgent matters of vital importance on its agenda.

Mr. President,

It is also significant that the Conference addresses evolving issues related to Disarmament. Advanced technologies provide new opportunities for the betterment of the humankind, but if unregulated, they also pose grave challenges.

The use of AI in weapons systems without human intervention is a matter of grave concern to my delegation. Sri Lanka consistently advocates on the centrality of human control in weapons systems. In this context, I am pleased to recall that, Sri Lanka co-sponsored the first ever UNGA Resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems in September last year.

Outer Space is a common heritage of mankind, and should be kept free of weapons. However, the demarcations between civilian, commercial and military uses of space technology are becoming increasingly opaque while emerging space technologies pose a growing threat to humankind. Sri Lanka has persistently supported calls for a legally binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space, which will address the gaps as they relate to new technologies, the increasing number of actors in space and the proliferation of space debris.

While discussions aimed at better understanding the potential threats to outer space by increased activity are welcome, that, or voluntary transparency measures cannot be a substitute for a verifiable legal instrument.

Mr. President,

Nuclear disarmament is of the highest priority, particularly in the present geo political context. In keeping with Sri Lanka's unwavering commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, we ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and also acceded to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2023. Sri Lanka has also been selected to host the Integrated Field Exercise (IFE25) in 2025 and we are also currently working with the CTBTO related to its preparatory work.

The possible use or threat of use of nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to humankind. It is therefore regrettable that this Conference has not been able to advance on negotiations for the early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on nuclear disarmament, as mandated by the UNGA. While we remain committed to complete nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as the only guarantees against their use, it is the legitimate expectation of non-nuclear weapons states to have unconditional, non-discriminatory and irrevocable legally binding Negative Security Assurances (NSAs), particularly in the context of the increasing threat of these weapons.

Mr. President,

Regional peace and security is the first step towards international peace and security.

The Middle East is once again on the agenda of all multilateral fora, and the crisis in Gaza is in imminent danger of spilling over to the rest of the world. History has shown us that peace and stability in the Middle East is crucial to global peace and stability. The threat of nuclear weapons is also very much alive in the region. While the immediate need is a humanitarian one, we strongly urge a resumption of the active deliberations on establishing a new nuclear weapons free zone in the region.

In conclusion Mr. Chair, let me reiterate Sri Lanka's commitment to Disarmament and we look forward to fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.