STATEMENT

BY

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AT

THE FIRST COMMITTEE

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(Check against delivery)
Mr. Chairman,

May I extend my delegation’s sincere felicitation to you, as a distinguished representative of the United Nations, as well as to the other members of the Bureau on your election. Let me assure you Mr. Chairman of our full support as you continue the work of your predecessors to reinvigorate the First Committee through interactive debate aimed at reaching more productive outcomes.

Following tradition, let me also commend the officials of the Secretariat, Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe, Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs and his team, both in New York and in Geneva for their invaluable dedication to the cause of multilateral disarmament in the face of the precarious financial situation of diminishing resources.

In this 60th year of the commemoration of the founding of the United Nations it is natural to recall the sombre global security situation into which the United Nations was born, the devastating World War that was unleashed in Europe and concluded in Asia with equally horrifying results. The UN Charter was drafted and adopted before the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the very first resolution adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly at its first session on 24 January, 1945, Res. 1(1) called for the elimination of all atomic weapons and ‘all other major weapons adoptable to mass destruction’.

We have to ask ourselves today, 60 years later, why this early consensus on multilateral disarmament and arms control has become so imperilled today that no agreement was possible even on a few paragraphs for inclusion in the outcome document of the High Level Plenary Meeting in September. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has reminded the international community ‘that our biggest challenge, and our biggest failing is the inability to agree on nuclear proliferation and disarmament’. In this context, we share the failed dismay of many, at the failure of the May 2005 NPT Review Conference to adopt concrete measures towards elimination of Nuclear Weapons. For too long now the multilateral institutions of the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament have remained in impasse, unable to agree on a programme of work. The First Committee therefore bears a special responsibility to promote dialogue and constructive engagement, to build the bridges towards the eventual return to multilateral negotiations in this great cause of disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

Condemnation of global terrorism remains one of the most persistent concerns of Heads of States and Governments that addressed the High Level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in September.

In the case of my country, Sri Lanka faces a special challenge in dealing with the rebel group engaged in a peace process. My President, Chandrika Kumaratunga has called on the United Nations to further mechanisms to support states genuinely committed to
democracy and peace processes and to sanction terrorist groups that undermine them. She reminded the international community that failure to do so would only erode the credibility of peace making efforts and years of work in codifying international legal and other measures against terrorism.

In this context, in April 2004 Sri Lanka welcomed the adoption of the Security Council resolution 1540 on WMD and non-State actors, and submitted its first report in May 2005 outlining legal and other measures that are in place to prevent the WMDs from falling into the hands of non-State actors. Sri Lanka will continue to work closely with the committee that has been established to monitor the implementation of this important resolution. Furthermore, Sri Lanka will soon be putting in place a comprehensive national legislation to give effect to the Chemical Weapons Convention to which it is a Party.

Only two disarmament issues, Mr. Chairman, those of landmines and small arms and light weapons, due to the existing humanitarian consensus, found reflection in the outcome document of the September High Level Plenary Meeting in New York.

Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in February 2002, 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 year 2006. An important first step was taken in September 2004 when Sri Lanka acceded to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons including its amended Protocol II and Protocols III and IV. A further step was taken in June this year when Sri Lanka submitted a report on a voluntary basis under Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. On 28th and 29th September this year, a workshop was held in Sri Lanka on the national implementation of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. These are some initial but significant steps that Sri Lanka has already taken towards achieving its ultimate objective of acceding to the Ottawa Convention on landmines to which Sri Lanka is committed in principle.

Mr. Chairman,

While the weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation, are continuing threat to human kind, small arms also threaten most people in the conflict and war zones of today. We welcome therefore the steady progress made this year on an instrument for the marking and tracing of SALW, moving towards the Review Conference in 2006. It has been our long standing position that the supplies of small arms and light weapons should be limited only to governments or to duly authorized internationally recognized entities and arms transfers, must be under duly set up national, and international control in order to prevent their illicit transfer into the hands of terrorists and non-state actors.

Since its adoption in 2001, Sri Lanka has been actively engaged in the national implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms. In October 2004, the President of Sri Lanka formally established the "National Commission to Deal with the Proliferation of Ilicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Sri Lanka". This was a landmark
steps towards the effective implementation of the UN Programme of Action. Apart from senior Government officials in relevant agencies, six members from the civil society also serve in the Commission.

As one of the initial undertakings of the National Commission, a National Survey on illicit Small Arms in Sri Lanka will be undertaken this year. It is expected that this National Survey will contribute to the formulation of a comprehensive National Plan of Action to deal with all aspects of the issue illicit small arms proliferation in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has also submitted two reports at the last two biennial meetings of States on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action, held in 2003 and 2005, outlining various activities undertaken in Sri Lanka. In this connection, my delegation would like to extend its appreciation to the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and to address the issue of illicit small arms and light weapons. Sri Lanka will also be host an international meeting on the issue of small arms transfers in collaboration with the Government of the United Kingdom this year.

Mr. Chairman,

In the Conference on Disarmament this year States continued to express support, and increasingly at the highest levels, for the role of the CD as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. CD delegations continued patient efforts to find a solution to return to substantive work, while once again the majority of the delegations expressed support for a comprehensive and balanced work programme based on the agenda.

During this year my delegation was pleased to note that an increasing number of delegations have expressed support for the re-establishment of an Ad-hoc Committee on the issue of PAROS in the CD. It would be recalled that over the last several years, my delegation together with the delegation of Egypt have introduced in the First Committee, a resolution on PAROS calling for the recommencement of stalled negotiations and confidence building measures on space security at the earliest. The increased support for this resolution over the years is a significant development. Recent initiatives taken by the Governments of Canada, Russia and China for further examination of the issues of space security in Geneva on the sidelines of the CD have resulted in a closer examination of the international legal regime to protect the sanctity of space as a common heritage of mankind.

Mr. Chairman,

In keeping with the understanding in this Committee that general statement be reduced and focused, our intervention has been confined at this time to only a few priority areas while we look forward to participating actively in the interactive Sessions on specific items of the programme of work.