Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, the delegation of Sri Lanka wishes to join all other delegations in congratulating you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. I also wish to thank Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands for ably guiding the work of the First Committee during the 70th Session of the General Assembly.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Chairman,

We are deliberating at this year’s First Committee, as the entire world is geared to implement at national level the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to build “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development” targeting “significant reduction of all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere”. In this context, global reduction of arms and disarmament have assumed an extraordinary degree of significance, as disarmament would be imperative to build peaceful societies, and to divert much needed resources to sustainable development from armaments.

Mr. Chairman,

Use of nuclear weapons poses the most serious threat to mankind and the survival of civilization. In this context, the need for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction is felt severely.

We believe that a transparent, sustainable and credible plan for multilateral nuclear disarmament is required in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Strengthening the disarmament treaty regime is essential to ensure a rule-based regime for nuclear disarmament. In this connection, we wish to reiterate the paramount value of multilateralism and the overall importance of treaties and international law in reaching the goal of disarmament.
Mr. Chairman,

As the international community continues to be confronted by the menace of terrorism, with the increasing threat of destabilization of established states, the danger of nuclear weapons, their means of delivery and related material falling into the hands of non-state actors is fast becoming a reality and will have dire consequences to humankind.

Our urgent attention must therefore be focused on this grave issue. There is a dire need to enhance coordination of efforts at national, sub-regional, regional and international levels in order to strengthen a global response to this serious challenge and the threat it poses to international peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

As we have pronounced many a time, the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, all States have an obligation to negotiate in good faith to achieve the objective of total elimination of nuclear weapons. While the nuclear weapon States must make progress in eliminating their stockpiles, nuclear weapon tests carried out by Member States, which compromise peace and stability of the world must be denounced.

Sri Lanka remains committed to striving with all States and other Stakeholders, to make nuclear disarmament realizable and bring peaceful uses of nuclear technology within reach. Sri Lanka’s commitment to the elimination of the threat posed by nuclear weapons is reflected in the international treaty obligations we have undertaken in the field of disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, more than at any other time, preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons require concerted efforts by all nations. This is particularly significant in the context of Target 4 of SDG 16 where world has resolved to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030.

The amassing and spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons continue to fuel conflicts and cause suffering in many regions of the world. Sri Lanka, as a country that experienced a nearly three decade conflict and the accompanying senseless destruction that is caused by the illicit trade in such weapons, is well aware of the gravity of this issue. It is known that non-state armed groups make ample use of the easy and illicit access to small arms and light weapons globally to procure and use such weapons with lethal repercussions on people.

Mr. Chairman,

As a signatory to the UN Programme of Action to Combat the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Lights Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA) of 2001 Sri Lanka established a National Commission Against the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms (NCAPISA) to deal with the proliferation of such arms in Sri Lanka. The Commission has taken steps to make a comprehensive assessment of the problem in the country, and to establish a national database on the civilian use of Small Arms and Light Weapons.
In this context, we welcome the adoption of the outcome document of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action (POA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (BMS6) held in New York, in June this year.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka has always been advocating that the outer space is a part of the common heritage of humanity. All humankind should have an equal opportunity to explore and utilize the outer space for peaceful purposes, and for the common benefit of humanity through cooperation.

In this context, all space actors have a responsibility to ensure that the outer space is free from conflict and to prevent it from becoming an arena for the arms race. Possible militarization and the potential weaponization of the Space environment have made the Outer Space a contested area and a source for future conflict.

Therefore, the existing legal framework on Outer Space needs to be strengthened since the political climate concerning the outer space sustainability and security has changed drastically.

We believe that conclusion of an International Agreement on the Prevention of the Arms Race in Outer Space would contribute in averting its catastrophic effect on humanity.

Mr. Chairman,

This debate provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the multilateral Disarmament Machinery as well.

In this regard, we recognize the role of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community. However, it is disheartening to note that the Conference has entered its 20th year of continuing stalemate and we regret the failure to adopt a substantive programme of work for this year. In order to demonstrate the relevance of the Conference on Disarmament, it is important to commence substantive work of the Conference at the earliest, based on a comprehensive programme of work. Sri Lanka will extend its support for any practical proposal that could re-ignite substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament.

We also reaffirm the centrality of the United Nations Disarmament Commission with its universal membership as the sole specialized and deliberative body within the UN multilateral disarmament apparatus that consider specific disarmament issues and submit concrete recommendations to the General Assembly. However, it is regrettable that the Commission has not been able to produce any tangible outcome for the past 16 years. The failure to find common ground for a way forward is a fact that we all as Member States must give serious thought to, and exert every effort to overcome the impasse.

Mr. Chairman,

The importance of disarmament education and research must also be highlighted. In this regard, we wish to commend the work carried out by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). It is vital that UNIDIR's work be supported by as
broad a representation of Member States as possible in order for the Institute to effectively carry out its unique mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

Regional disarmament mechanisms play a significant role in complementing and promoting the global agenda for peace and disarmament. In this regard, we wish to express our satisfaction at the activities carried out by the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific and to acknowledge its role in promoting UN activities at the regional level to strengthen peace, stability and security.

We are grateful to the Government of Nepal for its support for the Centre to operate from Kathmandu. We believe that it is imperative for the Regional Centre, in keeping with resolution 70/65, to move at the earliest its operations back to Kathmandu from Bangkok where the Centre was temporarily relocated following last year's earthquake.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to inform the Committee that Sri Lanka will be tabling draft resolution entitled "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects" under agenda Item 102 in this Committee.

In keeping with the existing practice, Sri Lanka will be tabling this annual draft resolution in its capacity as the outgoing President of the Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

The text of the draft resolution has already been agreed to by Geneva-based delegations, and circulated among New York based delegations.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation looks forward to constructive deliberations at this substantive session of the First Committee.

I thank you.