Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, Sri Lanka, would like to join all other delegations in congratulating Ambassador Sacha Sergio Llorenty Soliz, Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the other members of the Bureau on your election and wish you every success in the work ahead.

I also wish to thank Ambassador Ion Jinga, Permanent Representative of Romania, for ably steering the work of the First Committee during the 73rd Session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General and the High Representative for their unwavering support extended in seeking to realize the global disarmament objectives. My delegation would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Chairman,

As we move towards the 75th anniversary of the United Nations next year, it is an opportune time to take stock of the achievements and challenges before us. The High-Level segment of the UN General Assembly concluded last week, with a clear message by Member States on the need to adhere to multilateralism to find common solutions to issues of development, international peace and security, collectively.

Next year, the 2020 NPT review conference will take place in an uncertain international environment. We attach priority to full compliance with, and effective promotion of, the implementation of the NPT without further delay, and respect for its three pillars - the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament and the delicate balance built into the structure of the treaty, that are integral to global efforts at strengthening international peace and security.

The threat of Nuclear weapons remains more critical than ever and poses the greatest threat to humanity. Their testing and use can result in the most catastrophic consequences for life on this planet.

Sri Lanka has remained steadfast to our commitment to non-proliferation and its opposition to nuclear weapons. In this regard, we underscore that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should remain as the cornerstone multilateral agreement for disarmament. We were amongst the first States to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968 and the
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. We supported the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017.

Sri Lanka remains committed to global efforts on the total elimination of nuclear weapons, and calls upon states parties to NPT, that consider there is no legal gap in Article VI of the treaty, to demonstrate their commitment to nuclear disarmament through expeditious initiation of serious practical measures, and encourages states, that are not Party to NPT, to pursue an arms reduction option as a confidence building measure.

Mr. Chairman,

It was under Sri Lanka’s chairmanship of the Non-Aligned movement, that a call was made for a special session of the General Assembly to be devoted to disarmament and Sri Lanka introduced the draft resolution that lead to the First Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD) to be held in 1978. At that time, the call was made in view of the slow progress in disarmament.

Regrettably, some four decades on, the situation for disarmament continues to remain bleak and we seem to have reached an impasse. The threat of Nuclear weapons has not diminished and little has been done to eliminate Nuclear weapons. Instead states are modernizing their nuclear arsenals with increasingly destructive capabilities and developing new weapons and delivery systems. In the international arena, there is annulment of previously agreed agreements on arms control and disarmament and roll back of common understandings and agreed benchmarks. The grave risk of accidental, mistaken or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons remains ever present. These weapons are also vulnerable to technical failures, human errors and cyber attacks or falling into the hands of terrorist.

Dialogue and cooperation will be the only way to realize the objectives and purposes of the NPT, de-nuclearisation and bring lasting peace to this region and beyond. Therefore, we encourage all parties to persevere through dialogue and to refrain from actions that can lead to mistrust among the parties.

Total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only unequivocal way to ensure 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. Nuclear weapons states must make progress in eliminating their stockpiles.

Sri Lanka seeks to advance and promote respect for the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention and continue to call for their effective and non-discriminatory implementation. As for the Chemical Weapons Convention, Sri Lanka remains committed in delivering on its national obligations related to the Conventions. The National Authority in Sri Lanka has been re-oriented, with greater focus on security and disarmament perspective. In the backdrop of alleged use of Chemical Weapons in certain parts of the world, Sri Lanka joins other Member States in urging all State Parties to respect their obligations under the Convention, and refrain from use of these horrendous and indiscriminate weapons.

The physical safety of nuclear materials is a continuing concern, and all states that possess such materials as well as other states should continue to ensure that terrorists do not have access to them under any circumstances. We strongly support and call for the effective

We also call for practical steps towards establishing WMD-free zones, building upon the nuclear free zones that already exist, and, in particular, in the regions where such zones are not in place.

Sri Lanka also wishes to express its commitment to, and call for negotiation of a legally binding instrument on Negative Security Assurances.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka as a country that experienced nearly three decades of separatist terrorist conflict and more recently the Easter Sunday extremist terrorist attacks earlier this year, is aware of the devastation and destruction that is caused by small arms and light weapons (SALW) and illicit trade of weapons, where non-state actors are able to easily acquire illicit access to SALW.

Sri Lanka remains committed to the prevention, curbing and eradication of the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). These illicit trade flows of trade often have devastating impacts on fueling violence and crime, forced displacement of civilians and massive human rights violations.

Sri Lanka is a signatory to the UN Programme of Action to Combat the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Aspects and has established a National Commission against the proliferation of illicit small arms to address the spread of such weapons in the country.

We are alarmed that global military expenditure has now exceeded $1.8 trillion, and we would like to stress the importance of the reduction of these expenditure and urge that these resources be directed to economic and social development. This is also particularly relevant in the context of Target 4 of SDG 16, where we have resolved to reduce illicit arms flows by 2030.

Greater steps must also be made to address all related aspects of the problem of illicit small arms, including weapons collection and destruction, adequate legal and policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, proper stockpile management, as well as education and awareness. Any measures relating to conventional arms control, including small arms and light weapons, must be taken on the basis of placing human beings at the center of all efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

As part of our post conflict development and reconciliation, Sri Lanka has been focusing on the target of being mine-free by 2020 and moved forward on humanitarian disarmament, with government working together with a number of mine clearing NGOs and local organizations. It must be noted that the Sri Lanka Army was responsible for nearly 90% of the mines cleared, which enabled the speedy re-settlement of the internally displaced and the redevelopment of these areas. As a result, in December 2017, Sri Lanka became the 163rd country to accede to the Ottawa Convention on Anti-personnel landmines. Despite never having used these weapons, barely a few months later, in March 2018 Sri Lanka became the 103rd State Party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.
As a demonstration of our commitment towards disarmament, in 2015 Sri Lanka was honored to have Presided over the Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Conventions on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in November 2015. Having initiated State level discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems during its Presidency, which paved the way to the Government Group of Experts (GGE) in 2016, Sri Lanka supports the ongoing discussions within the framework of the CCW GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), and encourages the continuation of the GGE process. While recognizing the positive benefits that could accrue from the dual-use nature of the technology, new technological developments including 3D printing, synthetic biology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the development of LAWS devoid of any human control have created unprecedented risks and challenges to humanity. These are matters which, if not regulated, have the potential to threaten international peace and security. We encourage State Parties to the CCW to deepen and fast track the discussion within the GGE to urgently address the issues of possible development and deployment of LAWS. Given the increasing manner in which non-state actors and criminal elements are able to acquire more and more sophisticated weapons, we must be aware of the peril that these new technologies and weapons pose, when falling into the wrong hands.

It is in this context, that we encourage States with capabilities to develop autonomous weapons to take immediate action in placing national moratoria, as a temporary regulatory measure, and engage fully within the GGE discussions. Sri Lanka, however, calls for the negotiation of a binding legal framework which, inter alia, provides for regulatory norms with meaningful human control as its central thrust.

In September this year, Sri Lanka also presided over the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), having led the preparatory and coordinating process over a year, assisted by a Coordination Committee. The 9th MSP was important in that it created the momentum needed for the Second Review Conference to be held in Switzerland in 2020, and adopted the methodology for extension requests, and reviewed the implementation of the Convention by States Parties in general.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to these traditional and conventional areas, new technological advancements in ICT have given rise to new challenges in the international security landscape, particularly in cybercrime, cyber warfare and cyber attacks, that are alarmingly on the rise. Cybercrime account for trillions of dollars of losses, with some figures for 2019 indicating around $2 Trillion Dollars. An IoT device can be hacked in the first 5 minutes it is connected to the internet. In this backdrop, we welcome the ongoing UNGA processes to reach global consensus on international arrangements that apply to the digital environment and the behaviour of different actors in their uses of ICT. Sri Lanka, aligning with other States representing the global south, would like to see synergies between the work of the different processes, to agree upon a common global standard.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka would like to stress and underscore that outer space is part of the common heritage of humanity. It is the last frontier that needs protection and equal opportunity for humankind for exploration and utilization for peaceful purposes, for the benefit and in the interests of all
countries. We also have to ensure that outer space is free of conflict, and it is imperative that we prevent any militarization and weaponization of space.

It is for these reasons, that Sri Lanka and Egypt have been pleased to table an annual resolution for over two decades, titled “Prevention of an Arms race in Outer Space.” This year we seek the support for this important resolution, to which Sri Lanka will have the honour to introduce in the thematic cluster, which calls for the negotiation of a multilateral instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Sri Lanka also welcomes the work of the GGE on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space established through resolution 72/250, and regrets that the Group failed to agree on a final report.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka would like to reaffirm the vital importance of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament. In Sri Lanka’s interventions within the CD, we have highlighted how the international and regional strategic landscapes were becoming increasingly constrained.

This underscores the need, more than ever, for the CD to get down to its substantive task of addressing these challenges through negotiation of disarmament treaties.

Sri Lanka has consistently made its contribution to this end, most recently during its term as President of the CD in 2018 where a breakthrough was achieved on 16th February 2018 through Decision CD/2119, which rallied all CD Members together to agree to set up 5 subsidiary bodies to commence substantive work on all items on the CD agenda. It is noteworthy that this was achieved notwithstanding the challenging global environment, where on the one hand some parties raised concerns regarding the current relevance of the CD, and on the other many reiterating the urgent need for the CD to break the current impasse. At the time, addressing the High-Level Segment of the CD on 26th February 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcoming this Decision was to observe, “I believe you are off to the best start in nearly two decades, and I look forward to building on this new momentum”.

It is unfortunate that the difficult consensus and momentum generated by CD/2119, the subsequent naming of the Coordinators for the 5 Working Groups and the valuable work that was undertaken pursuant to the above Decisions, could not be further advanced.

During the first half of 2019, the members of the CD have, under different Presidencies, attempted to make progress by tabling two draft Programs of Work, and two Draft Decisions aimed at facilitating substantive deliberations through subsidiary bodies, which were discussed at length. Yet, the CD continued in a stalemate until the end of its calendar year 2019.

As the CD commences its 2020 Session under the Presidency of Algeria – our fellow G21 member under whose Presidency the CD had last agreed on a Programme of Work 10 years ago- it is hoped that serious practical measures will be initiated to break the deadlock, and to move forward on substantive negotiation of critical issues. That we do so would also send a positive signal to NPT Review Conference of 2020, which, in order to be successful, should get the right signal through the convergence of political will.
In this context, Sri Lanka sees value in returning to the consensus that resulted in CD/2119 and hopes it would serve as a tool to bridge the existing gaps, and bring the CD closer to fulfilling its mandate.

Our experience 20 months ago in enabling consensus around CD/2119, with the support of all the key players in the field, made clear that Member States are willing to agree on a forward-looking dialogue, which will remain sensitive to their concerns, while building mutual trust among the different parties. What we together achieved at the time, was the correct balance between flexibility and safeguards. We would encourage healthy P-6 consultations and coordination, to bring about meaningful progress in the work of the CD, and to prevent a repeat of the unfortunate situations that the CD has been facing in more recent months.

I want to assure you, that Sri Lanka stands ready to extend its support for any practical proposal or efforts that could return the CD to substantive work."

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, Sri Lanka reaffirms its commitment to the disarmament agenda, and continues to pledge its full support and commitment to the multilateral disarmament machinery. We reiterate once again, the necessity for concerted, collective action towards non-proliferation and eradication of nuclear weapons, the curbing of the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.
My delegation looks forward to meaningful and constructive engagement on these issues and others at this Session and continues to work towards reinforcing and enhancing the global agenda for peace and disarmament.

I thank you.