Madam President,

At the outset, let me join others in congratulating you on your appointment as the President of the Fifth Review Conference. You are leading this Conference under both time as well as financial constrains in addition to the substantive debates that is posed on a five day Review Conference. We wish to commend you for your efforts in working with delegations to overcome these challenges. I assure you the full support of my delegation over this week to make this Conference a success.

The CCW framework is an important principal instrument of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), with its unique structure enabling it to respond to the evolving nature of conflicts, as well as the sophistication of conventional weapons technologies, the fundamental basis on which this Convention was negotiated. In such a context, Sri Lanka believes that the Review Conferences provides a timely opportunity for the High Contracting Parties to assess the relevance and responsiveness of the Convention and its protocols to the contemporary challenges since the last Review conference, and to take decisions to strengthen the Convention and its implementation, and thereby contribute to further development of IHL. The process of review by the conference on a regular basis, in our view, also serves an important tool for of advancement of disarmament, by building confidence among signatories and stakeholders.

Madam President, we make this point emphatically, concerned over the slow progress on disarmament in the multilateral fora. We refer as well to the Review Conferences that have been held in the last two years in this regard. The success of this Review Conference is critical at this point, and it is our expectation that this process will strengthen the disarmament regime, contributing to further development of the IHL.

One of the key challenges before this Conference is to set the discussion framework on the issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). Sri Lanka notes the clear message delivered by many key countries, informing that they do not intend to develop such fully autonomous lethal weapon. However, the concerns of the
international community includes the fact that precursors for such weapons are already in existence and failure to take pre-emptive action at this point carries the risk of such weapons being developed in the future. Confidence building and standard setting should play a critical role at this stage, especially because it would be difficult to impose regulations once they are fully developed. This provides the rationale behind the call for pre-emptive ban on LAWS before these weapons change the current nature of conflicts by removing the human equation from the command and operational fields.

While national weapons review processes could to some extent contribute to deter development of LAWS at policy levels, we believe that the efforts should reach beyond national levels, to develop an agreed international framework.

Madam President,

Sri Lanka has emphasized the need for the discussion on LAWS within the CCW to be elevated to a State – driven dialogue, where countries would formally engage on the issue. In this regard, the 2015 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW, which Sri Lanka had the honour to preside over, for the first time, provided a formal dedicated session on LAWS last November. At the same meeting, State Parties recognized the need to move ahead on the discussion and agreed to a mandate allowing the 2016 April Meeting on LAWS “to agree by consensus on recommendations for further work for consideration by the 2016 Fifth Review Conference”.

The Expert Meeting held in April 2016 has now recommended that the Review Conference “may decide to establish an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in accordance with established practice.” Sri Lanka supports the creation of a GGE, and hopes that the spirit that prevailed on this issue during the 2015 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties and the Experts Meeting in April 2016, will continue at this Review Conference, in order to operationalize this recommendation and to commence formal discussions on LAWS.

Such a GGE could focus on the issue of definition of LAWS, as well as deliberate on the existing systems, in order to understand where and how to set limits to the autonomy of lethal weapons. Addressing challenges associated with IHL compliance in the case of possible use of autonomy in weapons should remain at the core of its agenda. The GGE should also contemplate on how to continue the unhindered access to the dual use autonomous technology for peaceful purposes, as this technology has wider potential for the benefit of human kind.

As already highlighted by my delegation at the Meeting of Experts and the Preparatory Committee Meeting, Sri Lanka believes that the CCW considering forward-looking action on this issue at this Review Conference is also important, in order to maintain its own credibility, and strike a balance between the legitimate
security imperatives of States and the inherent humanitarian concerns of the international community.

With regard to the discussion on Mines other Than Anti-Personnel Mines (MOTAPM), Sri Lanka welcomes the objectives of the current discussion on reducing the indiscriminate and injurious impact of these weapons. However, MOTAPMs have been used as affordable legitimate defensive weapons by a majority of countries. Financial pressure on developing countries that may arise from the adoption of alternatives or options as appropriate for their security should be seriously looked into.

In our view putting in place a credible mechanism for providing technological and financial support for countries to upgrade their MOTAPMs to reduce unintended suffering is important. It would go a long way to persuade developing countries, in particular those who are with limited military capacities and budgets to agree on a common stand with regard replacement of existing MOTAPM. Thus we request that discussion on MOTAPM be structured in such a way as to encourage developing countries to actively contribute to the cause, with a financial and technical support system in place.

Sri Lanka also welcomes the CCW’s continued focus on the Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) under Amended Protocol II of the Convention. This has provided States to share best practices, and to adopt national measures to counter the IED threat. We also welcome the Declaration on IEDs adopted at the 18th Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the APII and support continued dialogue within the CCW in this regard.

On a final note Madam President, we wish to emphasise the need for this Review Conference as well as the Meeting of High Contracting Parties to focus on the financial situation of the Conferences. State Parties and Observer States should be regularly updated on the financial status, and need to be encouraged to pay the assessed contributions on time in order to avoid any recurrence of the circumstances that we are facing at this Review Conference.

Madam President,

I wish you and the other office holders success in the conduct of this Review Conference, and hope that the States would cooperate in the adoption of a forward looking outcome document.

I thank you.