



**Statement at the Plenary on Youth and Disarmament
Conference on Disarmament
12 August 2021**

Mr. President,

Since this is the first time my delegation takes the floor during your presidency, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency. You can count on the full support of my delegation.

We appreciate the valuable insights of the distinguished panelist including Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth. Sri Lanka is proud of her leadership and proactive contribution to the youth strategy of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

Disarmament and non-proliferation have been one of Sri Lanka's key priorities as reflected by our active participation in the Conference over the years. Being the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, CD indeed has provided a useful platform for negotiation and drafting of a number of important treaties on disarmament and non-proliferation. However, as we are all aware, the CD's role has largely been relegated to a deliberative forum since the drafting of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996. No annual programme of work has been adopted due to lack of consensus. The year 2021 marked another difficult year for the CD as we yet again failed to adopt a programme of work. The international arms control and security regime in the meantime continues to deteriorate rapidly with the erosion of trust among the military powers, technological advancements in the absence of international limitations and increase reliance on nuclear deterrence.

It is in these worrying circumstances that we consider the topic of "Youth and Disarmament" as matter of timely importance. Youth is the hope of humanity, hope of our future. We consider youth as a fundamental element of disarmament and nonproliferation due to several reasons.

First, awareness of the youth on the importance of peace and security would be an investment in the next generation to transfer the knowledge and the seriousness of the issue. This would include development of expertise in the political, technical, scientific, and legal areas of disarmament for the capacity building and empowerment of the youth to pick up the baton on the campaign for disarmament.

Second, the youth have always been and continue to be an instrumental medium of bringing about change. They are passionate, fast learners and result oriented. In today's era of global connectivity, the youth could play a major role in the progressive use of the technology to raise awareness of the issue, and influence national and global policies. The youth of our times are native speakers of the language of computers, video games and internet, "the digital natives". While we have in a way become accustomed to the slow progress on disarmament, the next generation, if inculcated with the values of humanity, compassion and the substantive knowledge of the subject would strive for faster results.

The new ideas of the young persons would perhaps lead to break the stalemate of the CD the present generation has been attempting to unlock for decades.

Third, today's youth will be tomorrow's decision makers. Reality of life is such that all of us in the CD today, will in a matter of years be gradually replaced by our younger successors who constitute today's youth. They will step into our shoes and continue to shape the fate of the future world. This is why, the youth has to be encouraged and facilitated into the disarmament discourse so that they are equipped enough to take informed decisions at the right time.

Fourth, we must remember that the key rationale for the UN disarmament and non-proliferation discourse is none other than ensuring a safe and secure world for our future generations. The youth, by virtue of being a key component of that future, invariably become direct stakeholders of our work. This is particularly so in today's context where warfare seems to be relying more and more on new and future-oriented technology. The GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems is currently having an ongoing meeting ahead of submitting a report to the CCW Review Conference on the recommendations for an operational and normative framework autonomous weapon systems. Growing up surrounded by technology in almost every aspect of their lives, the debate on the prohibitions and restrictions on the autonomy of weapon systems have a direct impact on the peace and security environment of the youth of tomorrow.

Finally and most importantly, in discourses on sustainability which has received a special thrust in national development processes following the adoption of SDGs, the intergenerational equity remains a core principle in its normative architecture. In this conception, sustainability is meant to be a partnership between succeeding generations.. Youth are therefore at the heart of the concept of intergenerational equity, and disarmament is key to ensuring them a secure future with a planet whose resources are not subject to destruction by warfare or by their appropriation for non-peaceful purposes.

Mr. President,

The importance of the youth in disarmament has been emphasized in the UNGA resolutions 2250 of 2015, resolution 2419 of 2018 and 74/64 of 2019. Action 38, entitled "Establish a platform for youth engagement", under the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda has also triggered responses for inclusion of youth in disarmament education programmes across the world. As a beneficiary of the UN Disarmament Fellowship programme, I can personally guarantee the passion the programme instilled in me as a young diplomat from the global south. Youth outreach initiative, "#Youth4Disarmament" by UNODA to engage, educate and empower young people in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation is also noteworthy. In this context, we also continue to highlight the importance of encouraging young women to get more engaged in and contribute to the disarmament and non-proliferation discourse and decision making.

In conclusion, allow me to highlight one more important element of youth involvement in peace and security. In order to attract the youth to the disarmament discourse, they need to be educated on its importance and how serious the present generation takes on the issue. In order to reap the benefits of the next generation to expedite global disarmament

efforts, it is important that young persons are provided the opportunities for constructive participation in the discussions and led by example. Therefor, it is high time for the members of the CD to demonstrate true political will and genuine flexibility to show satisfactory progress so that the young generation is motivated, inspired and engaged.

| Thank you very much Mr. President .
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