



**Farewell Statement by Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha, Permanent
Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations,
at the Conference on Disarmament – 27th March, 2018**

Madam President,
Excellencies, and Distinguish Delegates,

I will be leaving Geneva at the end of this month, after completing nearly 5 1/2 years of what has been a challenging, yet stimulating experience, as the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN and other inter-governmental organizations. I wish to avail of this opportunity to thank Director-General/ UN in Geneva and Secretary-General of the CD Mr. Michael Møller, Deputy Secretary General Anja Kaspersen, the staff of the CD Secretariat, the six Presidents of the 2018 Session, the regional coordinators and in particular members of the core-group, as well as all members of the CD that worked with my delegation during Sri Lanka's Presidency of the CD earlier this year.

I also wish to thank Member and Observer States of the CD, and all Civil Society experts, who have helped me both understand and contribute to the processes of Disarmament - whether within the CD itself or in other disarmament mechanisms such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) which Sri Lanka had the honour to Chair in 2015, during which time we were able to evolve a consensus on advancing the mandate on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).

Madam Chair, the successful adoption of CD/WP/607 under the Swiss Presidency, naming the five coordinators to the subsidiary bodies and a schedule of work to operationalize decision CD/2119 adopted on 16 February 2018 under Sri Lanka's Presidency of the CD, makes my moment of departure from Geneva particularly satisfying. I want to also acknowledge the significant work done by Ambassador Veronica Bard of Sweden in reaching agreement on the coordinators, who will lead the five subsidiary bodies based on the principle of equitable geographical representation. I congratulate and wish the very best to the Ambassadors of Indonesia, the Netherlands, Brazil, Germany and Belarus, as they move CD/2119 forward.

Madam President,

For long years, Sri Lanka has been an active player in the field of disarmament. I am pleased that Sri Lanka's recent presidency was able to once again make a meaningful contribution through CD/2119, notwithstanding the challenging global environment we live in today. Addressing the High-Level Segment of the CD on 26 February 2018 UN Secretary-General António Guterres 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".

Our ability to forge this agreement is testimony to the fact that Sri Lanka makes its best contributions to the international community when it leads from the centre. It would not have worked if our positioning in the CD had led us, either being taken for granted, or to remain isolated. This decision was a balance between flexibility and safeguards, and it offered a framework for a more focused and continued debate on all the core issues on the CD agenda. I believe this has the potential of being an irreversible first step in getting the CD back to work, and in asserting its credibility as the single multilateral forum for negotiating disarmament treaties.

CD decision CD/2119 was also not an accident. I must say that if there is any ambiguity in it, it was not by mistake. It was in fact a deliberate and conscious decision, which was unanimously endorsed by all of us on 16th February 2018, in order to help get the CD out of the impasse it had been for 22 long years. Once again, today's decision has proved that members of this body are capable of continuing with the momentum generated and arriving at decisions.

In the same spirit I believe, certain cardinal principles upheld in arriving at CD/2119; inclusiveness in consultations, transparency in engagement without pre-conceived agenda, and allowing adequate time to deal with the genuine security concerns of all Member States, will undoubtedly help us as we move through the next steps of operationalizing this decision and bring the Conference back to negotiations.

In doing so, the Conference must no doubt be guided by the rules of procedure. However, as I said when we were negotiating CD/2119, I wish to reiterate that the CD must not allow itself to be held captive by those rules. The rule of consensus has not been the reason for the CD's stalemate, but it is the lack of political will. Clearly the issue is not procedural, but political. We will be better served, if we use the rule of consensus, as a tool for compromise, rather than as a veto. If we are to stay relevant as the sole multilateral body for negotiating disarmament treaties, the CD will also have to strike a compromise between those who believe that only one issue is ripe for negotiation and others who believe that there are equally important low hanging fruits in the agenda.

We were able to overcome that block and reach a compromise earlier this year when we adopted CD/2119. Besides the flexibility shown by all delegations that were closely engaged with us, of particular significance was that once the decision was adopted in February, some of the delegations who had continued to show a degree of scepticism about the CD process, expressed their willingness to work constructively towards realization of the goals set in it and getting the CD back to work. We must be conscious that unless this window of opportunity is seized on, this momentum could be lost.

Eventually, whether CD/2119 was a beginning or an aberration remains to be seen. But one thing is certain. The cost of standing in the way of the CD moving forward has become greater.

As I leave, my hope is that our recent collective achievements will encourage all of us to work harder to iron out whatever difficulties that lie ahead, to not shift goal posts, and to restore the credibility of the CD as the single multilateral forum for negotiating disarmament treaties.

Madam President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I thank you all very sincerely for this opportunity to bid you farewell, and wish you every success in your future work, both professional and personal. It has been my honour to work with you. I thank you.