



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. (CCW)
Meeting of High Contracting Parties
Opening Remarks by Chairperson Ambassador Ravinatha P. Aryasinha,
12th November 2015

Excellencies,

Distinguish delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to serve as the Chairperson of the 2015 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the 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. I wish to take this opportunity to convey to you my appreciation for the trust and confidence that you have placed in me and my country to take forward the objectives of this Convention. This is also a clear sign of the international recognition of Sri Lanka's steadfast contribution to the field of disarmament over many decades. Our acceptance of the Chair, in turn, was yet another manifestation of Sri Lanka's firm belief in and commitment to the UN multilateral system and the pivotal role it plays in maintaining international peace and security, notwithstanding the continued challenges it faces.

The CCW umbrella Convention with its five Protocols stands unique from other conventions. They cover as wide a category of weapons as could be known as conventional, and leaves scope for national and international measures to address the challenges they pose to humankind. It also provides the necessary guarantee towards enhancing cooperative security taking into account the security interests of all States and on the basis of the principle of undiminished security for all. It also ensures the need for full compliance with IHL principles, thereby protecting both civilians and combatants from indiscriminate attacks and unjustifiable suffering. To this end, its framework provides flexibility to expand discussions on issues related to emerging military technologies and means and methods of modern warfare, which could be of concern to States, as well as citizens. While conventional arms are perhaps less dramatic in nature and more limited in scope compared to Nuclear Weapons or Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), however due to their wide use in internal and international armed conflicts, these weapons continue to inflict death and tremendous damage globally on a daily basis. Also due to the comparatively low regulation of conventional weapons, especially the easy access to them by non-state actors and the possibility to improvise in order to make injurious effects, its victims are largely unassuming civilian populations.

The Convention has made significant progress in evolving appropriate responses with regard to the emerging areas of technologies and means and methods of warfare in the field of conventional weapons, such as the already demonstrated success in the negotiation of the subsequent protocol IV (Blinding laser weapons) and V (Explosive remnants of war). At the same time, the Convention has not been able to secure expected results in certain other areas, such as on cluster munitions.

Therefore, the challenge before us, is to through our collective efforts and unwavering commitment, to strengthen the Convention and to make it relevant and responsive to the contemporary realities. Doing so on the one hand will build confidence among States and restrain any aggression against countries. On the other hand, enhanced commitment on disarmament and non - proliferation will enable countries to effectively utilise scarce resources for realising economic and development goals. The interconnectedness between development and peace has been recognised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goals, in particular in goal 16, and the stipulated targets envisages to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths, and combat terrorism and crimes. Therefore, I invite you to use this two day forum to comprehensively address all issues of interest.

Since assumption as the Chair - designate of the CCW at the Meeting of High Contracting Parties in November 2014, I have been working closely with the Past Presidents/Chairs, delegations from Member States, Civil Society, and International Organisations including the ICRC, in carrying forward the objectives of this Convention. As I had the occasion to brief you during the informal preparatory meeting held on 17th September 2015, our efforts have focussed on 3 main areas;

First, in keeping with the 'Accelerated Plan of Action on Universalization' adopted at the Fourth Review Conference, with assistance from the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), I have held open briefings on universalization with the League of Arab States and ASEAN, besides the bilateral consultations undertaken with prospective State Parties. I warmly welcome state parties who have joined the CCW this year, and are attending their first Meeting of the High Contracting Parties.

Second, following the April 2015 Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) where some States expressed the interest for an enhanced dialogue, I consulted a number of countries that have remained engaged on this issue, in order to ascertain whether there was a consensus regards 'upgrading' of the discussions. I spoke with States, international organizations and non-governmental organisations and I have maintained an open door to all delegations wishing to discuss this issue. From my consultations it was evident that consensus had yet to evolve towards establishing a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). However States expressed clear willingness to continue the work on autonomous weapons within the CCW. Therefore, it is up to the State Parties to decide over the next two days as to what other measures we could adopt, in framing the 2016 discussion into a step forward from the past, with a more focused mandate on LAWS. A forward-looking approach and outcome is imperative going forward. In this regard, it is significant that during the discussion in the First Committee in New York last month, a notable number of delegations, 32 to be exact, had addressed the issue of

autonomous weapons in their national statements. I also take note of the call by the UN Secretary General to States Parties today, "to pursue focussed and structured deliberations on this matter". I look to the active engagement from States Parties in putting forward their views in this regard, at the dedicated discussion on LAWS this afternoon.

Third, in view of the 5th Review Conference coming up next year, I have also engaged with States regarding its preparation. I will further update you on nominations received for the respective positions, as well as on the meeting schedule for 2016, during the respective agenda items.

As we enter the final year of the current review cycle and look towards the 5th Review Conference next year, it is also important for us to reflect on how the Convention has contributed to the development and implementation of international humanitarian law. The framework has provided legitimate protection to both civilians and combatants alike from the devastating effects of conventional weapons, while making the distinction between the two categories. Due to the obligations set out in the Amended Protocol II and Protocol V, following armed conflicts, greater efforts are now being made by Parties to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war. The CCW and its Protocols have also provided opportunities for States to learn lessons, share experiences and best practices and to render assistance to affected States. Capacity building remains at the centre of all efforts at containing the debilitating effects of such weapons. The national reporting requirements and efforts of States Parties in this regard continue to serve as a confidence building measure among State Parties. In addition, the Convention and its Protocols are also currently deliberating on the on-going and emerging issues such as the IEDs, MOTAPM and LAWS.

This progress would not have been possible without the active support and commitments of the State Parties, Signatories, the UN agencies, International Committee of the Red Cross, other International organisations and civil society. I also want to appreciate the valuable work done by the respective Presidents, with the assistance of the officials of ISU and the Disarmament Expert of my own Mission.

While observing and learning through the historical challenges faced, it is the responsibility of all of us, the State Parties, to provide new impetus and leadership to strengthen the CCW framework and to ensure it continues to remain abreast of new developments, which may yield outcomes whose potential for dual use is unfettered, with out human control.

I look forward to the active participation of Member States and other stakeholders during this meeting, in order that we could reach consensus decisions that will make a tangible difference in ensuring peace and security for all, and thereby create a conducive atmosphere which could help sustain progress in the SDGs.

I thank you.