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Sri Lanka ready to share its experience in comprehensive demining as a 'best practice' with other countries

Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Ravinatha Aryasinha has said Sri Lanka stands ready to share its experience in comprehensive demining as a 'best practice' with countries which are facing similar challenges. Noting that "Sri Lanka's continuing progress in demining has been achieved by telescoping what according to some estimates was to take 15 - 20 years, into one of 5 - 7 years duration, he said this was not only a rewarding experience for our people as they now move about freely across the country, but also a positive lesson for other conflict affected countries, where nationally owned and nationally driven programmes could achieve their intended purposes, if the necessary political commitment, resolve and pragmatic vision is put in place".

Ambassador Aryasinha made these observations when he addressed the 16th Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the use of Mines, Booby-Traps and other Devices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) on Wednesday (12 November 2014) at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons came as a result of an increased international realization that the effects caused by certain conventional weapons may be excessively injurious and indiscriminate. The Convention and its Protocols together manifest a clear intention and commitment of the Contracting Parties to address this challenge effectively, through the adoption of national programmes and measures.

Ambassador Aryasinha said "the GoSL successfully embarked on a very difficult challenge of demining an area of approximately 5,000 square kilometers of land initially estimated to be contaminated with mines, out of which approximately 2,064 square kilometers were confirmed as hazardous areas. The scale of the problem Sri Lanka faced in demining can be clearly seen from the number of mines and other devices unearthed and neutralized during the demining process. Over 1,128,336 explosive devices (1,712- anti tank, 615,669-anti personal and 510,955 UXOs) have been recovered as at September 2014. Five years since the ending of the terrorist conflict in Sri Lanka, so far this year alone, a total of 55,761 explosive devices, including 78 Anti- Tank mines, 28,577 Anti Personnel mines and 27,106 UXOs have been recovered. Demining continues to take place as the number of mines and IEDs laid by the LTTE was extensive and their locations unknown."

He said, "75% of this demining work had been allocated to the Sri Lanka Army, which was the largest single area assigned to any of the parties involved in demining and included most of the densely mined regions. The demining process was also supported by funding from donor countries and the UN and carried out by INGOs/NGOs such as the Halo Trust, DDG, MAG, FSD, Sarvatra, Horizon, MMIPE and DASH."

"Out of the total confirmed hazardous area, 96.2% has already been cleared and only 78.8 square kilometers of territory remains to be cleared. It is expected that these areas too will be completely cleared in the near future."

Ambassador Aryasinha said, "due to this efficient and effective demining process and also to the infrastructure development in the former conflict affected area, the Government of Sri Lanka was able to resettle a total of 510,710 persons (153,837 families) out of nearly 767,748 IDPs (226,824 families), in the Northern Province and 257,038 persons (72,987 families) in the Eastern Province. As per the Joint Study undertaken by the Ministry of Resettlement, the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province (PTF); and the UNHCR, as of August 2014, only a total of 26,056 persons (7,840 families) remain to be resettled, which includes 21,747 persons (6,498 families) from the North and 4,309 persons (1,342 families) from the East."

He noted that "while focusing on the operationalization of the Amended Protocol II and considering matters arising from the annual reports presented by High Contracting Parties, it is imperative that special attention is paid to the development of technologies which could protect civilians. Similarly, it is important that concerted efforts be taken to create greater awareness among the public about indiscriminate effects of mines, booby traps and other devices. It may also be timely to look into effective cooperation to ensure the wellbeing of victims in a more coordinated manner."

Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka
Geneva

12 November 2014



**Address by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha,
Permanent Representative/Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the UN**

**16th Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II
on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the use of Mines, Booby-Traps
and other Devices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)
12 November 2014**

Madam President,

I wish to congratulate you on your election as the President of the 16th Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the use of Mines, Booby-Traps and other Devices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. I am confident that you will steer the discussions of this meeting in an efficient and inclusive manner. I would like to convey the full support of my delegation to you in fulfilling your mandate.

The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons came as a result of an increased international realization that the effects caused by certain conventional weapons may be excessively injurious and indiscriminate. The Convention and its Protocols together manifest a clear intention and commitment of the Contracting Parties to address this challenge effectively, through the adoption of national programmes and measures. The Amended Protocol II in particular engages our special attention in this context. It remains the only legally-binding instrument that covers Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) explicitly, and development of technologies to protect civilians against indiscriminate effects of mines. That IEDs are becoming a global threat today is evident from the number of casualties that have suffered from such devices in on-going conflicts around the world, in both international and internal conflicts.

The important contribution that the Amended Protocol II makes to global efforts to alleviate the suffering caused by certain conventional weapons can not be overemphasized. While focusing on the operationalization of the Amended Protocol II and considering matters arising from the annual reports presented by High Contracting Parties, it is imperative that special attention is paid to the development of technologies which could protect civilians.

Similarly, it is important that concerted efforts be taken to create greater awareness among the public about indiscriminate effects of mines, booby traps and other devices. It may also be timely to look into effective cooperation to ensure the wellbeing of victims in a more coordinated manner. We consider the Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II an ideal platform to share experiences and to identify and develop best practices.

Madam President,

In the spirit of contributing to the discussion of 'best practices', let me share with you Sri Lanka's experience in grappling with these issues.

As you are aware, the people of Sri Lanka suffered for almost three decades at the hands of the ruthless terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is presently listed as a terrorist organization by many countries including India, the United States of America, the UK, the European Union, and Canada. The LTTE, blatantly disregarded any rule of war and used explosives, mines, booby traps liberally and indiscriminately. They used IEDs, Booby traps, suicide jackets, explosive ridden vehicles, antipersonnel and antitank mines extensively and indiscriminately. The LTTE made IEDs in the form of mortar shells connected to tripwires to act as fragmentation mines, using electrically initiated explosive devices placed at strategic locations and mines connected with detonating cord to mortar/ artillery shells placed in at a distance. Technology used in the manufacture of these devices and mines could be best understood by the manner in which they were used from the initial stages of the conflict, until its end, and the extent of the devastating effects they had on civilians.

Having rescued approximately 300,000 civilians from the LTTE through a Humanitarian operation in May 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka took the issue of demining as a priority as it was crucial to ensure early settlement of IDPs. The GoSL successfully embarked on a very difficult challenge of demining an area of approximately 5,000 square kilometers of land initially estimated to be contaminated with mines, out of which approximately 2,064 square kilometers were confirmed as hazardous areas. The entire demining programme was carefully planned and meticulously executed. Priority areas were chosen to maximize efficiency and enable speedy return of the internally displaced. The first priority was to demine the towns and villages. The second priority was to demine the agricultural areas and paddy fields. The last priority was to clear the forest areas.

Seventy five percent of this demining work has been allocated to the Sri Lanka Army, which was the largest single area assigned to any of the parties involved in demining and included most of the densely mined regions. The demining process was also supported by funding from donor countries and the UN and carried out by INGOs/NGOs such as the Halo Trust, DDG, MAG, FSD, Sarvatra, Horizon, MMIPE and DASH.

Mr. President

The scale of the problem Sri Lanka faced in demining can be clearly seen from the number of mines and other devices unearthed and neutralized during the demining process. Over 1,128,336 explosive devices (1,712- anti tank, 615,669-anti personal and 510,955 UXOs) have been recovered as at September 2014. Five years since the ending of the terrorist conflict in Sri Lanka, so far this year alone, a total of 55,761 explosive devices, including 78 Anti- Tank mines, 28,577 Anti Personnel mines and 27,106 UXOs have been recovered. Demining continues to take place as the number of mines and IEDs laid by the LTTE was extensive and their locations unknown.

Out of total confirmed hazardous area 96.2% has already been cleared and only 78.8 square kilometers of territory remains to be cleared. It is expected that these areas too will be completely cleared in the near future. 98% of the area allocated to Sri Lanka army has already been cleared and only 32 square kilometers of territory remains to be cleared.

Due to this efficient and effective demining process and also to the infrastructure development in the former conflict affected area, the Government of Sri Lanka was able to resettle a total of 510,710 persons (153,837 families) out of nearly 767,748 IDPs (226,824 families), in the Northern Province and 257,038 persons (72,987 families) in the Eastern Province. As per the Joint Study undertaken by the Ministry of Resettlement, the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security in the Northern Province (PTF); and the UNHCR, as of August 2014, only a total of 26,056 persons (7,840 families) remain to be resettled, which includes 21,747 persons (6,498 families) from the North and 4,309 persons (1,342 families) from the East.

The National Mine Action Programme initiated in 2002 with the assistance of UNDP, UNICEF, INGOs, local NGOs and several donor countries with the goal of creating a mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) free environment in support of the resettlement and development programmes of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), is presently coordinated

by the National Mine Action Centre (NMAC)¹, as part of the National Strategy for Mine Action 2010, and it has been successfully addressing the five pillars of mine action, namely, Demining, conducting Mine Risk Education /MRE, Victim Assistance programmes, Destruction of stockpiles of anti-personal landmines, and Advocacy.

Madam President,

Overall, Sri Lanka's experience in comprehensive demining programmes may no doubt be useful for countries which are faced with similar challenges and also relevant specially for the disarmament discourse in this particular arena. It is pertinent to note that Sri Lanka's continuing progress in demining has been achieved by telescoping what, according to some estimates, was to take 15 – 20 years, into one of 5 – 7 years duration. This is not only a rewarding experience for our people as they now move about freely across the country, but also a positive lesson for other conflict affected countries, where nationally owned and nationally driven programmes could achieve their intended purposes, if the necessary political commitment, resolve and pragmatic vision is put in place.

Sri Lanka believes that by sharing experiences and renewing commitment to action on the ground, States may be in a better position to combat the use of IEDs and other devices successfully. Government of Sri Lanka continues to stand ready to share its experience with other countries that are similarly placed, in an effort to relieve those who undergo suffering.

I thank you.

¹ <http://slnmac.gov.lk/>