



STATEMENT

by

Ambassador Sarala Fernando

**Head of Delegation of Sri Lanka to the
Conference on Disarmament**

at

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Mr. President,

May I take this opportunity to say how pleased we are to see you in the chair and that my delegation will extend our fullest cooperation towards the successful conclusion of your Presidency.

Your proposal to convene the four formal plenary meetings on items of the agenda has truly reflected the impatience of the majority of delegations including my own, to get the CD back to work, even as we must wait for some sign of political will from capitals, in your words "even the slightest modification of existing instructions and positions on the outstanding issues".

For purposes of the record let me also state that my delegation can accept the A5 or any other proposal that would meet consensus on a programme of work for the CD. The food for thought paper presented during the Presidency of Ambassador Chris Sanders which was further developed during the Presidency of Ambassador Tim Caughley, represent brave efforts to take us out of the present stalemate. Many delegations during the current plenary meetings reconfirmed our belief in the continued relevance of the CD and we would request you Mr. President to try to see whether any of the practical suggestions advanced such as for the setting up of working groups on pressing issues, could be taken forward.

Mr. President,

Over the past 35 years, a number of treaties and agreements have been concluded to protect assets in space, among which, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 concluded in the early years of space exploration, remains the most important. As we approach the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Outer Space Treaty, we would urge member states to work towards universalizing the Outer Space Treaty, which currently has 98 State Parties. For those delegations who today question the need to negotiate treaty law in the disarmament field, let me ask them to consider the level of vulnerability of the commercial, communication, verification and intelligence assets in space, if not for this existing multilateral legal regime.

My delegation would in fact argue that there is a need for ever increasing common endeavours among all member states to prevent weaponization so as to preserve space as a sanctuary for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all peoples. We would remind once again that it is an easier task to prevent an arms race in outer space than to 'attempt to control and decelerate such a race after it has begun'. The world cannot afford an expensive competition in outer space when there remain so many challenges before us such as poverty, hunger, disease and deprivation.

Mr President, in your opening statement you had mentioned that we may soon celebrate a decade without agreement on a programme of work for this conference. It is in this context that I would like to remind all of us of the important early work achieved in the Adhoc Committee on PAROS when it was in session, the last being in 1994. It was in the Adhoc Committee on PAROS as far back as 1993 that France called for confidence building measures in outer space to enhance the existing treaty regime and prevent the aggressive use of space; a proposal for prior notification of space launches was also presented which was further developed elsewhere; it was in the Adhoc Committee on PAROS that the issue of space debris was first taken up, which is now being taken to its necessary conclusion in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

The present Russian-Chinese initiative to develop possible elements for an international legal agreement on the prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space is an important step which we hope would contribute positively to the efforts to agree on a mandate for an Ad-hoc Committee to address this issue in the CD.

My country Sri Lanka and Egypt traditionally introduce at the First Committee of the UN General Assembly a resolution entitled 'Prevention of an Arms Race in the Outer Space' which calls for the recommencement at the earliest of the PAROS negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament. Over the years, our resolution has been gaining increased support, which is a reflection of the growing international interest in finding collective ways to keep space peaceful.

Last year in his address to the General Assembly, the Canadian Prime Minister proposed a course of action calling for the extension of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty to ban all weapons of mass destruction including all weapons based in space. In this context, it may be useful Mr. President to remind ourselves that the very first resolution that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 24th January, 1946 called for the elimination of all atomic weapons and "all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction". Although today we tend to think of WMD in a more limited definition, the time may have come to go back to the earlier broader definition of WMD which could cover even conventional weapons or new types of weapon systems that can be used for the purpose of mass destruction.