

Statement by the Head of Delegation of Sri Lanka
16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer
of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction

18-21 December 2017
Vienna, Austria

Mr. President,

This 16th Meeting of States Parties which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the signing of the 'Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction', is a special and significant one for my country, as this is the first occasion on which Sri Lanka participates as a full State Party to the Convention.

On 13th December, Sri Lanka took the important step of joining the majority of countries in the world that are parties to this Convention.

Mr. President,

Although we are the youngest State Party to the Convention, having deposited the Instrument of Accession just a few days ago, mine clearance was made a priority in my country 15 years ago in 2002, with the launch of the National Mine Action Programme.

Mr. President,

Ours is a country and a people that have faced the harrowing ordeal of the absolute terror and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. We have witnessed at first hand, in our country, the devastation they cause to life, and how productive land is turned to waste, and fields of terror.

This is the reason why Sri Lanka made mine clearance and mine-risk awareness, priorities in our country, with the goal of creating a 'mine and Explosive Remnants of War free environment' that would facilitate resettlement and development, long before acceding to this Convention. We are pleased, Mr. President, to inform this forum that we have succeeded in clearing 98% of the contaminated areas in our country. This we achieved with the generous assistance and cooperation received from partner countries and donors as well as the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organisations. I take this opportunity therefore, to express the deepest appreciation of the Government of Sri Lanka for the assistance provided by all countries and organisations for mine-clearance and mine-risk-awareness efforts in Sri Lanka.

As you would be aware, Mr. President, the National Unity Government formed in my country, following the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in 2015, works with determination towards realizing the vision of a peaceful, stable, reconciled and prosperous nation for the benefit of all our citizens. Resettlement, restoration of livelihoods, economic empowerment and development, and ensuring non-recurrence of conflict are priorities in this endeavour. What we set out to realize, is a society that upholds and abides by the highest standards of international human rights and humanitarian law. Devices that cause indiscriminate harm to human beings, Mr. President, have no place what-so-ever in the future that we seek for our country.

Mr. President,

As we journey on this path, we require the continued assistance of the international donor community, to resolve the remaining challenges associated with landmines in Sri Lanka. We are acutely aware of the

continuing devastation caused by the use of these indiscriminate weapons in many parts of the world, even at this moment, as I speak. We are aware, therefore, that there are many places in the world that require assistance. Yet, we hope that Sri Lanka's challenges in this respect, continue to receive the due attention of the international community, considering its deeply humanitarian nature.

Mr. President,

The achievements under this treaty, over the years, have been remarkable, not only in terms of the number of mines that have been destroyed and the area of land across the world that has been returned to communities, but in terms of the number of lives saved, and the number of victims that have been, and continue to be assisted.

We are deeply appreciative in this respect, of the work of the Special Envoys of the Convention, Prince Mired of Jordan and Princess Astrid of Belgium, and we are hopeful that Prince Mired will visit Sri Lanka next year.

Mr. President,

The world has committed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In our view, increased financing and new partnerships to sustain and accelerate efforts in mine clearance is essential for achieving the SDGs. Therefore, it is critical that the international community focuses its attention on this important aspect.

Mr. President,

Today, having joined the Convention, we in Sri Lanka join hands with all the other parties to this important Convention, and the dedicated men and women across the world, to devote ourselves as well, to advocate

and work towards achieving the objective of a 'mine free world', where people can go about their lives without fear of these devastating weapons. We look forward to sharing our experience and our expertise with the international community, in realizing this noble vision.

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you, on behalf of my delegation, on your appointment as the President of the 16th Meeting of States Parties, and assure you of our fullest cooperation in ensuring the success of this Meeting.

Thank you.