

**The Fourth Review Conference 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
25 to 29 November 2019 – Oslo, Norway**

General Statement- Sri Lanka

Mr. President,

We join all delegations in congratulating you and your team on the success of your Presidency, and commend the leadership provided by you throughout the year.

The Review Conference is the appropriate platform for making a realistic appraisal of the progress made in achieving the objectives of the Convention and in addressing challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, in our shared goal of securing the world free of mines. It provides an opportunity for reassuring, pledging assistance and cooperation to state parties, thereby giving confidence and encouragement to state parties and other stakeholders to move forward with their national mine action programmes in a sustained, predictable manner. As a result of this constructive enterprise, we already have before us a blueprint for practical pathways, the Oslo Action Plan.

For Sri Lanka, this conference represents an important opportunity to provide an outline of the progress made in mine action and a repertoire of experience gained as well as the path ahead in the direction of achieving mine-free status, with the continued support of our partners and implementing agencies. We have done this in a number of panel discussions that took place alongside this Conference in the last five days.

Mr. President,

As a country that has successfully emerged from the armed conflict since 2009, Sri Lanka appreciates and underlines the pronounced need for humanitarian disarmament and arms control. Norms of humanity and related principles of international humanitarian law, including proportionality, inform discourses on regulation, control and eventual elimination of weapons that are excessively harmful, in general, and landmines and cluster munitions in particular. As a state party to the Ottawa Convention, we remain committed to both advancing, as well as contributing to the universal realisation of, the objectives of the Convention that bans landmines through its entire cycle, from production to use.

Following years of humanitarian demining work that was undertaken even as the conflict was raging, we are now next in line to achieving mine-free status.

Through sustained national efforts at mine risk education, we also succeeded in bringing civilian casualties of landmines, to zero by 2018.

Mr. President,

Sri Lanka's mine action experience has proved to be both complex and unique. Its complexity extends beyond just the physical landscape, namely the vast areas of habitation turned into abandoned lands over 30 years of fighting. The armed conflict also put asunder the social fabric. Non-availability of mapping of mines and marking of areas where land mines were laid by the non-state actor in the conflict, added further to the challenge of demining that the Government and the Sri Lanka Army had undertaken amidst great sacrifices.

The mine action initiative was launched in the North and East of Sri Lanka in 2002. During this period and a few years immediately thereafter, with the continuation of the demining work, a process of rehabilitation and resettlement was underway. Between 2005 and 2009 even as the armed conflict had intensified, the mine action programme driven by the Sri Lanka Army continued, in the midst of the intensity and ferocity of the violence and terrorism that occurred. In our view, the tremendous amount of work that was done on the ground, paving the way for the release of lands and resettlement of affected persons, makes Sri Lanka a distinct case from situations that experienced similar challenges.

Consolidating the gains made, the newly elected Government remains steadfast in its commitment and vision of securing Sri Lanka free of landmines.

Mr. President,

The continued progress on the mine action front demonstrates three salient priorities, which in our view constitute the main plank of Sri Lanka's policy, strategy and vision for enhanced peace and security.

First, Sri Lanka has implemented and continues to implement a rehabilitation and resettlement programme, which has ensured the return of displaced persons to the cleared areas through an accelerated process. Livelihood support and sustainable reintegration remain at the heart of this programme.

Second, Sri Lanka has adopted a diligent approach towards addressing conflict-induced and long term displacement.

Third, Sri Lanka has taken a number of measures to improve the conditions of IDPs, and the return of lands remains among them. The ratification for Sri Lanka of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016 is an important highlight.

All these and several other initiatives taken by Sri Lanka coalesce into a national programme of rehabilitation and inclusive development.

Last, but not least while Sri Lanka continues to make steady progress towards the goal of mine free status, we would also be able to share our knowledge and expertise with others who are engaged in mine action programme in different regions.

We are confident that our collective efforts would help realize the SDGs while fulfilling the objectives of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. It is in this context that we endorse the Oslo Action Plan as a consensus outcome that could provide practical pathways to concrete action in all areas of mine action as well as to the effective implementation of the Convention.

I thank you, Mr. President.