

**Introductory remarks by Mr. Thomas Markram at the joint panel discussion
of the First and Fourth Committees on possible challenges to space security
and sustainability**

Thursday, 12 October 2017, New York

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to participate in this second joint meeting of the First and Fourth Committees. At the outset, I wish to thank the Chairs and bureaus of the Committees for their support as well as to extend my appreciation to the Office for Outer Space Affairs for their close cooperation in organizing this panel. I also thank the panelists for travelling to New York to participate in this session.

Just two days ago, the international community commemorated the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the Outer Space Treaty. This landmark instrument codified the foundation of outer space law and established the shared objective of maintaining space as a realm of peace. Some of its important legacies include the non-militarization of celestial bodies and the non-placement of weapons of mass destruction anywhere in outer space.

The treaty was central in ensuring that the Cold War arms race did not extend beyond the boundaries of the Earth. Yet, it did not aim to comprehensively solve all possible challenges to outer space security. Concerns relating to the weaponization of space were left for future deliberations, and they remain to this day an urgent priority. Therefore, the theme of this meeting provides a fitting opportunity to take stock of the global governance regime for outer space activities.

The increasing accessibility and use of outer space by governments and the private sector has brought undeniable benefits to human development, well-being and security. Space-based activities touch upon every aspect of modern life. Our dependence on outer space affects all sectors of society, from the economy to the military. However, outer space is a fragile environment and the actions taken by one actor can impact all others.

Preventing any conflict from extending into outer space thus remains an urgent imperative, even as growing military dependence on outer space is increasing its strategic significance and exposing the inherent vulnerability of space-based assets. The preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes has also been regarded as an essential step necessary for the United Nations to accomplish its ultimate objectives in the field of disarmament since 1957 and resolution 1148.

Yet, despite the subsequent conclusion of the five international treaties governing outer space, some aspects of the legal regime meant to prevent outer space from becoming a realm of conflict remain largely underdeveloped. For instance, there appears no dispute that the right to self-defence is applicable to activities in outer space. However, there remains a lack of common understanding of how this right could be applied in conformity with international law and without resulting in severe and long-lasting consequences.

While we have yet to witness any active arms race in outer space, the relevant technological capabilities have existed for decades. Many concepts for the placement of various types of disruptive and destructive counter-space capabilities have been studied, developed and tested. Anti-ballistic missile systems deployed today could function as anti-satellite weapons.

Secretary-General Guterres has described our world as one of new and old conflicts woven in a complex web. At the same time, we live in an era of exponential acceleration in the rate of scientific and technological development. These trends, when factored together, point to an increasing potential for the rapid emergence of new military capabilities to finally tip the balance and result in the uncontrolled expansion of armed conflict into outer space. Such an outcome could have unimaginable consequences.

Against this backdrop, it is encouraging that the United Nations appears to be experiencing a renaissance in its long-standing efforts to increase security and sustainability in outer space and to prevent an arms race in this domain. I will just highlight a few areas where we see the greatest opportunities for progress.

Since 2013, the General Assembly encouraged and subsequently called upon all Member States to review and implement the proposals of the group of governmental experts on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space activities.

Entities within the United Nations system have established coordination mechanisms, including through UN-Space, to assist Member States in the implementation of these measures. The Secretary-General issued a report in April which described these activities, identified gaps, and recommended ways in which UN entities can further assist in the implementation of TCBMs, if so decided by Member States.

In this connection, it is encouraging that there appears to be a high level of interest in pursuing deliberations in the Disarmament Commission in its forthcoming cycle on the implementation of TCBMs on the basis of the joint proposal by China, the Russian Federation and the United States.

The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space agreed last year to an initial set of guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space. It continues to work hard on finalizing the outstanding issues, a number of which address international security matters, including some contained in the 2013 GGE report and beyond.

Finally, China and the Russian Federation have proposed the establishment of a new expert group intended to further the elaboration of legally binding measures to prevent an arms race in outer space. If approved by the General Assembly, the work of this group could help narrow differences on how the outer space legal regime could be further codified and developed, pending the end of the stalemate at the Conference on Disarmament.

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In recent years, we have built up substantial momentum toward advancing outer space security in the interest of peace and disarmament. I hope this joint meeting today can serve as a platform for a comprehensive review of these efforts across the UN system and point the way for the progressive development of outer space governance for the benefit of all.

Thank you very much.