Statement Kingdom of the Netherlands Item 9 – General exchange of information and views on legal mechanisms relating to space debris mitigation and remediation measures, taking into account the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

Mr Chair, I thank you for giving met the floor.

Mr Chair, distinguished delegates,

In March of this year, the European Space Agency published its Space Environment Report. Its Key Takeaways on Space Debris are chilling. Instead of mitigation and remediation of space debris, we have seen, in 2024, several major fragmentation events as well as many smaller ones, together adding thousands of new debris objects. This underlines the need for prevention by implementing passivation and reduced orbit lifetime measures. Also, while intact satellites or rocket bodies are now re-entering the Earth atmosphere on average more than three times a day. Yet not enough satellites leave heavily congested orbits at the end of their lives, creating a collision risk. And collision creates further debris. The report also shows that almost all space debris is the result of propulsion (intentional object release), deliberate action, and collision. All of which are human-made and could be avoided.

It is also no secret that most orbital debris comprises human-generated objects. It is also no secret that this problem is particular acute in the Low Eath Orbit. The suggestion is sometimes made that there is no space law that obliged us, and in particular the space faring nations, to clean up the Low Earth Orbit. In the view of my Government, this is not entirely true. While it is not for this subcommittee to discuss the technical developments required for the reduction of the creation of such human-made space debris as a result of space operations, it is very much for this subcommittee to develop the legal framework that induces compliance with our obligations in outer space, including towards future generations. It is also for thus Sub-Committee to promote responsible behaviour in outer space, to disseminate good practices, and to develop further norms and rules, including, eventually, legally binding instruments.

It is time to take our obligation to ensure the freedom of access seriously. We must promote non-legally binding initiatives and instruments dedicated to reducing space debris. These include the Artemis Accords, the Space Debris Compendium, and the Long Term Sustainability Guidelines.

Finally, Mr Chair, my Government would like to stress that it considers the intentional intentional creation of space debris, in this day and age and at this level of development, as irresponsible, and frankly, unlawful. ASAT tests constitute the most glaring example of the disregard for the safety and sustainability of outer space activities. The deliberate, and unnecessary, destruction of a space object

in outer space is unlawful. My government has joined the growing number of States, creating undeniable international consensus, declaring a moratorium on ASAT tests. However, also the incidental, but preventable, permanent loss of control over a space object would be unlawful. Such an object may become space debris itself, or cause collisions, that in turn create further long-lived space debris. As such, the issue of space debris is closely connected to that of Space Traffic Management. The Kingdom of the Netherlands would therefore recommend that space traffic management measures are taken also with the view to taking space debris mitigation measures.

I thank you for your kind attention.