



The Statement
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to the Conference on Disarmament

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. President,

At the outset, let me congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this Conference. You are assured of active cooperation of my delegation for the success of the German Presidency under your able leadership. Allow me also to express the gratitude of my delegation to your distinguished predecessor Ambassador de La Fortelle for his efforts. My delegation will fully support you as we have done with your predecessors to find common grounds for fulfilling CD's obligation towards strengthening international peace and security through means of disarmament.

Mr. President,

The action taken today by the delegations of China and the Russian Federation by presenting a joint Working Paper on "*Possible Elements for a Future International Legal Agreement on the Prevention of the Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects*", in our view, is a welcome initiative. We believe that this timely proposal will receive the attention of this Conference.

Mr. President,

For this purpose, Sri Lanka firmly supports the early establishment of an ad-hoc Committee in the CD on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) with an agreed mandate. Our commitment to this issue is a manifestation of our often repeated belief that the outer space is the common heritage of the humankind and therefore we are all equal stakeholders of this last frontier of our world. In this regard, we are of the view that the outer space should be explored, and made use of, only in a spirit of cooperation and not in confrontation. It is in this spirit, for long years, that Sri Lanka has co-authored a resolution on PAROS at the First Committee of the UNGA. Our efforts there have been aimed at building consensus and to extend to the extent possible, an agreed framework of action by all member States of the UN, in particular by the space powers, towards preventing an arms race in outer space.

Mr. President,

An Ad-hoc Committee on PAROS at the CD, was first established in 1985 and it was re-established every year up to 1994. Consequently we have already examined and identified a number of important issues relevant to the prevention of an arms race in outer space. However we regret that since 1995, the CD has not been able to establish an ad-hoc Committee on this issue, for lack agreement on its mandate.

Mr. President,

We live in an era of globalization. Breathtaking and unprecedented advancement in technology now reach out towards the next frontier, the outer space. Such developments are facilitating global reach for many, as a natural corollary of globalization, affecting all aspects of our lives, including peace and security. Consequently, commercial and scientific use of outer space, sometimes even for military purposes, are growing at break neck speed to enable humankind to reap the benefits of the productive use of outer space. In this context, no doubt, there is an urgent need to ensure that this last frontier is used only for non-offensive and non-belligerent purposes. Time has come for the international community to focus its attention on outer space with a view to preventing this pristine environment from becoming a battle ground for military supremacy. The world, Mr. President, could ill afford an arms race in outer space at this juncture of the human history. Meagre resources and energy available are required to be directed towards more noble purpose. The upliftment of the majority of the humankind who are still living in abject poverty is one such essential endeavour. It is irrational and unwise to do otherwise. Recent acts of terrorism have so amply demonstrated that a security regime based only on exotic weapons may not be the best measure to achieve human security. It is also becoming evident that a sense of strategic stability that currently prevails among major powers could be in grave danger if outer space becomes an arena for an arms race.

Mr. President,

Taking measures to Prevent an Arms Race in Outer Space seem a more effective, less-complicated and less expensive task than attempting to control such a race after it has begun. If we foreclose opportunities for discussion and negotiation on this subject now, the international community may have to grapple later with calls for non-proliferation of belligerent weapon systems deployed in outer space in time to come. This, Mr. President, would be unnecessary. The enormous cost of an arms race in space could be easily avoided if we take action now. Moreover, through a substantial peace dividend that may arise out of non-belligerent use of outer space, the benefits of space activities, which are presently confined to a few existing and emerging space capable countries, could be made available to all nations.

Mr. President,

The joint working paper submitted by the delegations of China and the Russian Federation appears as a general outline of some elements of a more complex and substantive multilateral instrument or instruments required to address this issue in all its aspects. Such an exercise, we reckon, would take many years of discussion and negotiation. We therefore hope that this working paper would positively contribute to our efforts to elaborate an agreed mandate for an ad-hoc committee which would take into account the urgent need to address the issue of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space in this Conference.

Thank you.

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