



Open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviours, 10 May 2022

Statement by Sri Lanka on General Exchange of Views

Mr. Chair,

Sri Lanka would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of the first session of the 2022 of the OEWG on reducing space threats and for the opportunity to share our views on this subject. You have our full support in moving this process forward towards a substantive outcome. We would also like to appreciate the thought-provoking presentations made by today's panelists.

Sri Lanka's active engagement on the issue of Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) has been well known and dates back to the early 80's when with likeminded developing states, we called for the preservation of outer space as the common heritage of all mankind, to be used in cooperation and solely for peaceful purposes. It is in as far back as 1985 that Sri Lanka proposed a moratorium on the testing and development of space weapons preceding multilateral negotiations on a treaty to prohibit all weapons in space. As you are aware Sri Lanka continues to present the First Committee Resolution on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) alternatively with Egypt each year for over four decades and remains true to its principled position that outer space is the common heritage of all humanity and should be kept free of weaponization.

In today's context it is common knowledge that space based technologies play an increasingly essential role in the maintenance of national and international civilian infrastructure enabling critical economic and security activities on Earth. Furthermore, the fast-blurring line between civilian, commercial and military uses of space technology is a matter of concern in maintaining the stability and safety of space. This is all the more reason why we emphasize on the need for retention of space, the last frontier of human kind as a peaceful domain for exploration for the benefit of entire humankind.

We remain deeply concerned of the imminent weaponization of outer space and the possibility of a dangerous arms race in outer space the prevention of which would be much easier than diffusion and de-escalation. Trends in the development of offensive space capabilities including missile defences, launch of the Space Forces by certain space faring nations as well as issues with anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities raise the urgent need for internationally agreed limitations to ensure that outer space remains a domain free from conflict.

Sri Lanka supported the 1st Committee Resolution entitled "Reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviors" in line with our principled position of supporting all multilateral initiatives aimed at promotion of peaceful use of outer space. Sri Lanka's support to the OEWG is based on the understanding that;

(i) that the discussions in this OEWG will be complementary as well as an 'interim' step towards the negotiation and development of a comprehensive and verifiable legally binding treaty on prevention of an arms race in outer space;

(ii) that the common understanding and progress which the near majority of States have achieved so far on this issue is not disregarded in the course of this new initiative.

Many states have pointed out over the years the need for legal clarity and advancement of state activities in space should be built on the existing legal framework. Definitional clarity on terms such as 'outer space', 'weaponization in space', 'space weapons', 'space systems' etc require further efforts. While the Outer Space Treaty provides a good basis, negotiations for a multilateral instrument to address the new technological developments, increasing space actors as well serious concerns on proliferation of space debris is necessary to fill the existing legal gaps on this issue.

We share the concerns in this regard by the distinguished panelist today morning regarding lack of clarity on legal consequences of the concept of "irresponsible behavior" and the need to define internationally wrongful acts on this issue.

We remain hopeful that the deliberations in this forum would contribute to the development of universally agreed upon norms and TCBMs leading to create the necessary momentum for more ambitious steps, including the eventual possibility of a comprehensive, verifiable, and legally binding regime on PAROS.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

