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Remarks by H.E. Ambassador LI Song on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space at the Thematic Debate of the Conference on Disarmament

June 1, 2021

Mr. President,

The Chinese delegation wishes to thank you for organizing today's thematic discussion on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS). We would like to thank the four panelists for their presentations this morning. The active participation of delegations as shown in the long list of speakers bears witness to the great importance CD members attach to the agenda item on PAROS.

Mr. Hassan of Egypt gave us an online presentation on the enormous amount of work that have been carried out by various multilateral arms control platforms on PAROS in recent years. His presentation reminded me of the thematic discussion that was organized on the same topic in the CD two years ago. On that occasion, Ambassador Patriota of Brazil, the Chairman of the 2019 Group of Governmental Experts(GGE) on PAROS, also made a full presentation to the CD on the topic. The two presentations, reflect not only the high importance the international arms control community attach to outer space security, but also the sensible, responsible and professional attitude to explore various proposals and initiatives in a comprehensive, balanced, objective and impartial manner. We welcome such ambient and working method, which is urgently needed by the international community to address outer space security challenge as one of the most pressing issues.

In the statements we heard today, it is widely recognized that the growing utilization and exploration of outer space, driven by advances in space science and technology and their wide applications, are fostering development and prosperity in human society along with mounting security challenges and risks. As to how to effectively cope with these challenges and risks, there

are a number of different views. The U.S. Ambassador, in his statement, specifically mentioned that the Draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against outer space Objects (PPWT) tabled in CD by Russia and China retained “fundamental flaws”. He also drew a picture of “China’s threats in outer space”. To this, I just want to point out that the fundamental flaws in his statement are the deliberate omission of the reference to the long-standing Strategy of Space Dominance pursued by his country. In fact, the fatal flaws of the US policies in this regard is its refusal to commit itself to the non-weaponization of and prevention of an arms race in outer space as the priority objective of maintaining outer space security.

As a matter of fact, the growing trend of turning outer space into battlefields is caused, first and foremost by the Space Dominance Strategy, pursued by the super power with the most elaborate space military strategy, arms plan, and military capabilities. It is this country that has openly declared outer space as a new “war-fighting domain” or "operational domain", accelerated the buildup of combat system in outer space, including establishing space force and space command, boosting investment in the R&D on space weapons, directed-energy weapons, etc, speeding up the deployment of related weapons and equipment, and beefing up outer space military coordination capabilities with its allies. These actions have fueled the trend of military buildup and war-preparedness in outer space, heightening the risk of turning outer space into a battlefield and drastically adding to the uncertainties around outer space security.

The strategy of seeking hegemony in outer space by certain country is bound to increase the vulnerability of outer space security. Advances in military capabilities in the fields of BMD systems and long-range rapid precision strike weapons are challenging the traditional strategic balance and stability. The first country that carried out the anti-satellite weapon tests is also the one that has subsequently conducted most of such tests and produced the largest amount of space debris in that process. It has time and again emphasized the important role of outer space in its missile defense system, and has plans to develop space-based monitoring and interception systems , and to deploy the upgraded Counter Communication System (CCS) capable of jamming signals and even disrupting satellite communications of its adversaries. These technologies can be diverted to offensive military use, thus posing a serious threat to the security

of outer space assets of other countries. In line with its strategic doctrine, emphasizing on “competition”, “adversary” and “threat”, this country has been testing offensive and defensive space capabilities, threatening the space assets of other countries, exacerbating the tension in outer space, and compounding the risk of military miscalculation and conflict.

Do these above-mentioned have nothing to do with the United States?! Is it merely a science fiction blockbuster produced by the Hollywood Studios?!

Mr. President,

In response to the accusations and smears made by the US against China, I would like to emphasize that China is not the United States, and has no intention to develop or implement a similar Space Dominance Strategy. The essence of the draft PPWT, is the non-placement of weapons in outer space, and the non-threat or use of force against space objects. This fully demonstrates China’s commitment to non-weaponization of, and prevention of an arms race in outer space. Any theory of “China’s threats in outer space” is utterly pale and untenable in the face of such a solemn initiative.

For 40 consecutive years, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted by an overwhelming majority the resolution on "Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space", calling for negotiations of an outer space arms control treaty. The 72nd Session of UN General Assembly again passed by an overwhelming majority the resolution entitled “Further Practical Measures to Prevent an Arms Race in Outer Space” which established GGE on PAROS. This fully demonstrates the international community’s preoccupation with the potential weaponization of outer space. Although the GGE failed to adopt a substantive report due to the blocking by the US alone, all parties did engage in unprecedented, in-depth, and substantive discussions on the elements of an international legally-binding instrument on arms control in outer space, thus laying the important foundation for the next step forward of arms control in outer space.

Space security and space safety are two different dimensions of outer space issue. Space security is about the weaponization of, and arms race in outer space, and the resulting risk of strategic miscalculation, accidental clashes, or even conflict, which constitute a fundamental threat to

outer space security. Space safety is about risks associated with the peaceful use of outer space, including, inter alia, orbit congestion, collision and space debris, which are the common challenges that all space-faring countries are faced with. These two dimensions of outer space security are different in nature and are not amenable to same solutions. If we could not prevent an arms race in outer space and safeguard peace in outer space, neither security nor safety could be possible. The formulation of norms, rules and principles on responsible behavior is by its very nature a transparency and confidence building measure. While it has a positive role to play, such a measure is not legally binding and cannot fill the loopholes in existing international legal instruments on outer space or replace negotiations on an arms control treaty on outer space. Given the complex nature of outer space security issue, the binary distinction between "responsible" and "irresponsible" behaviors in outer space is too simplistic, and subjective, and is open to political manipulation.

In China's view, upholding and ensuring an outer space security order based on international law, together with negotiations to conclude a legally binding instrument to prevent the weaponization and arms race in outer space, would be the most important "responsible behaviors" to maintain outer space security. Discussions on "responsible behaviors in outer space" should serve the fundamental goal of preventing an arms race in outer space. All relevant discussions should adhere to multilateralism and avoid politicization, discrimination and exclusivity.

First, we must hold the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable global security, share the responsibility in safeguarding outer space, with a view to achieving common and universal security. The major powers should abandon the mindset of unilateralism, the pursuit of absolute superiority, absolute freedom, and unilateral security in outer space, change the strategies and policies aimed at space dominance, and correct the mistake of putting the security of one country or one group of countries above the security of other countries. We must stick to the bottom line of avoiding conflicts or even wars in outer space. All parties should strengthen dialogue, increase mutual understanding and trust, and avoid confrontation and miscalculation.

Second, we must respect and abide by the basic principles set out in existing international law. All countries should make sure that their space activities are in conformity with international law and principles governing international relations, as a bare minimum in demonstrating that they are acting responsibly. It is important to earnestly follow the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, abide by the *Outer Space Treaty(1967)*, *the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space*, *Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects* and *Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into outer space*, and to fulfill in good faith international legal obligations.

Third, we must continue to pursue the ultimate goal of preventing an arms race in outer space. The highest priority is an early start in negotiations to conclude a legally binding international arms control treaty on outer space. The United Nations should once again establish a GGE or an Open-Ended Working Group on the PAROS. "Responsible behaviors in outer space" can be one item on its agenda. Pending the agreement on a Program of Work and the official launch of relevant negotiations in CD, a technical expert group could be established to carry out in-depth discussions on technical issues such as definition, scope, and verification of a future legal instrument on arms control in outer space. The draft PPWT jointly proposed by Russia and China can serve as an important basis for this work. I would like to stress once again that we have never imposed this draft on anyone, as it is an open initiative. All members of the CD are welcome to discuss it in depth and improve it together.

A war in outer space cannot be won and should never be fought. The history of nuclear arms race must not be repeated in outer space. We should preserve the outer space as a new frontier for cooperation, rather than a new battle ground for competition and confrontation. China stands ready to work with all parties in outer space with a view to building a community with a shared future for mankind, and actively explore practical and effective solutions against space security threats from the perspective of common security for all mankind, in a bid to contribute to peace, security and sustainability of outer space.

Thank you, Mr. President.