



UK Mission  
Geneva

## **OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON REDUCING SPACE THREATS THROUGH NORMS, RULES AND PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOURS**

### **AGENDA ITEM 5: GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS**

#### **STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM**

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament  
Geneva, 9 May 2022

Mr Chair,

Despite having already done so at our organisational meeting in February, let me begin by congratulating you on your election as Chair of this body, and assure of my delegation's full support.

I want to use this general statement to set out the UK's overall approach to this Open-Ended Working Group, which is elaborated further in the working paper we have submitted.

As you have noted, this meeting marks the substantive start of a new process, mandated by the UN General Assembly with the support of an overwhelming number of Member States, to tackle the breadth of space threats and to prevent an arms race in outer space. We have seen unimaginable technological developments in the last decade that change the way we understand threats to space systems. But diplomacy has not kept pace. We hope and believe that this new process will build collective understanding of the wide variety of threats that could prevent us from using the data and information we get in and through space, and of the risk that those threats could undermine regional and global stability. Above all, we hope it will breathe new life into multilateral efforts to tackle space threats and keep the space domain secure and accessible to all.

Our starting point is that, to achieve the prevention of an arms race in outer space we need to consider the totality of space threats that we face and all of the space systems we use. It is not sufficient to focus solely on one class of weapon or just on the non-placement of weapons in space. That would ignore the range of capabilities, in the hands of an increasing number of States, that could damage or deny access to other countries' space systems and the data and information we use from them, both through kinetic and non-kinetic means.

Misuse of those capabilities, or misunderstanding or miscalculation by States in response, could lead to escalation to conflict, with serious consequences for national, regional and global security. The UK believes that framing this problem in terms of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours – that is, on the actions, activities or omissions of States – rather than the capabilities themselves, many of which are dual purpose or hard to effectively verify, is more likely to lead to solutions.

We recognise that many delegations want those solutions to be enshrined in a legally binding treaty. We hope that this will be possible. History has shown that successful legal instruments are usually the result of an iterative process, such as this one. So, the responsible behaviours approach is not a prescription for moving slowly but a way to get the journey started.

Mr Chair,

International efforts to reduce threats to space systems received a welcome boost last month with the commitment by the United States not to conduct destructive direct ascent anti-satellite missile tests. We welcome this move and encourage others to follow suit.

This is a great first step. But we need to go further to reduce the risk of miscalculation and escalation by working together to develop norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours around the other threats to space systems. For example, in our submission to the 2021 UN Secretary General's report pursuant to UNGA resolution 75/36, the UK proposed seven types of activity and 11 areas of behaviour that would benefit from expert-level discussion.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the focus of this first meeting on taking stock of the existing international legal and other normative frameworks concerning threats arising from State behaviours with respect to outer space. International law applies to the activities of States in, and in relation to, outer space. The existing legal framework includes the UN Charter and customary international law. We also benefit from a body of existing treaty law for space, including the Outer Space Treaty. The legal framework also includes the law of armed conflict which would apply to any operations in space conducted in the furtherance of hostilities in armed conflict. In addition, we have a set of internationally recognised guidelines, standards and practices that apply to space and space related activity. In short, we are not starting from zero and there is much we can do within existing frameworks to reduce threats to space systems. We look forward to engaging in the detail of that discussion during the course of this week.

Finally, Mr Chair, the issues we are discussing this week are of fundamental importance to the maintenance of global peace and security, currently threatened by Russia's unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack on Ukraine. Russia's actions challenge the very foundation of the rules by which we coexist, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, making the work of this group even more important.

The UK looks forward to what we hope will be constructive and enlightening discussions this week, under your expert leadership. Thank you for your efforts in getting us to the point where we are today and you can count on my delegation's positive engagement throughout this process.

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