

General Remarks by H.E. Amb. LI Song
at the First Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on reducing
space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours

Mr. Chair,

The Chinese delegation congratulates you on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Open-Ended Working Group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours. We will work together with other delegations to actively support your work. We gladly noted that, under your able leadership, all parties have been participating in serious and substantive discussions in the spirit of equality and mutual respect. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the experienced colleagues and knowledgeable panelists that you invited, who have contributed to the discussion to a great extent. We hope that the OEWG could base itself on its mandate as stipulated by the UNGA resolution, facilitate the comprehensive exchange of views on norms, rules, and the principles of responsible behaviours, and develop convergence on the basis of collective wisdom, so as to contribute to achieving the goal of prevention of an arms race in outer space and safeguarding security in outer space.

Mr. Chair,

As a global commons, outer space is closely related to the security and welfare for all, and has striking features of a community with a shared future for humankind. As the exploration of outer space and related technological advances, outer space has increasingly contributed to economic and social development as well as human civilization, which benefits all countries. However, space security is also facing increasing challenges. Preventing an arms race in outer space is the key precondition for peace, safety and the sustainable use of outer space.

Both from a historical perspective as well in reality, the root cause of such an arms race is that the superpower attempts to dominate outer space. This is a sword of Damocles long hanging over outer space. Although the Cold War ended 30 years ago, the power still cling to the cold war mentality, constantly pursues unilateral strategic advantages and authorizes more space plans and operations to dominate outer space. It pursues a strategy of “space dominance” and declares outer space as a warfighting

domain. It also established Space Force and Space Command, and merged commercial space enterprises into their space combat systems. Moreover, space weapon tests and military exercises are frequently conducted; military alliances were established to enhance combat readiness in space. In addition, some other space powers established dedicated space military bodies to increase their capacity of space forces. Certain military-political bloc even defined outer space as an operation domain where collective defense provisions are applicable. Such moves clearly demonstrate the rising risks of the weaponization and arms race in space, their negative impact to the global strategic stability, and the long-term impairment of space peace and security.

Mr. Chair,

Since the beginning of humankind's exploration of outer space, the international community has been making its efforts to prevent outer space from becoming a new battlefield. In 1958, UNGA adopted the resolution "Question of Peaceful Use of Outer Space", which explicitly indicated the wish "to avoid the extension of present national rivalries into this new field". In 1978, the SSOD-I stated the goal to pursue PAROS through "appropriate international negotiations". Starting from 1981, the UNGA has been adopting, by an overwhelming majority, a traditional PAROS resolution on a yearly basis, demanding the Conference of Disarmament (CD) to negotiate on PAROS. More encouragingly, this traditional resolution (A/RES/76/22) was adopted without a vote last year. Evidently, all countries that supported the new resolution regarding responsible behaviors are in favor of the traditional PAROS resolution. This indicates that the mainstream view of the international community firmly believes that the negotiation and conclusion of an outer space arms control treaty should be the primary goal. Only on this basis, it is meaningful to discuss concepts such as "responsible behaviors in outer space", which should not delay or even substitute the negotiation of a legally binding instrument.

Frankly speaking, judging from related discussions in UNGA, the negotiation of the UNGA resolution on responsible behaviours, and the submissions pursuant to the resolution, the UN Member States obviously have different positions, concerns and views and propositions regarding the concept of "responsible behaviors". It makes it even more necessary for the OEWG to uphold true multilateralism and to respect opinions and treat them on an equal footing. Therefore, the OEWG process should take

an objective and realistic attitude to the differences among Member States and conduct in-depth discussions. Necessary efforts should be made to avoid and reject politicization, discrimination or exclusive approaches in the discussion. During the process, of great importance is the principle of consensus, which serves as the prerequisite for any possible outcome of the OEWG to be widely supported and adopted.

China believes that the international discussion on “responsible behaviors in outer space” should follow the principles as follows:

First, safeguarding common and universal security. The country with the ablest space capabilities bears special and primary responsibilities in this regard. In this regard, the primary and fundamental “responsible behaviour” by the superpower should be its commitment of not seeking hegemony and dominance in outer space. No country should assure the security of its own or of a small group of countries by undermining the security interests of other countries, nor cling to major power competition or military bloc confrontation. All countries should, by building a community with a shared future for humankind and bearing in mind the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable global security, shoulder the common responsibility of maintaining outer space security and should cope with threats to outer space security through cooperation.

Second, persisting in preventing an arms race in outer space and intensifying the international efforts for the negotiation and conclusion of a legally binding instrument on PAROS. Member States are encouraged to support the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament (CD). Such support itself should be regarded as one of the most important responsible behaviors. As the first rotational Presidency of the 2022 CD Session, China facilitated the CD in reaching a comprehensive and balanced as well as clear and concise decision that established 5 Subsidiary Bodies. This provided a new platform for the CD to advance substantive work on its agenda items, including on PAROS.

China and Russia submitted to the CD in 2008 their draft “Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against

Outer Space Objects” (PPWT) and updated it in 2014. Up to now, this is the only official proposal of a legally instrument on PAROS. The PPWT clearly bans the placement of weapons in outer space and threat or use of force against outer space objects. Taking into account the dual-use nature of space technologies and the complexity of space weapons, the aforementioned two fundamental obligations of the PPWT focus on the greatest challenges to space peace in a results-oriented manner, and offer an effective and practical solution in the framework of international law. Supporting the negotiation on PPWT represents a litmus test for being responsible for space security.

China notes that the US recently committed not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing. We welcome all arms control initiatives that truly contribute to PAROS. Meanwhile, we oppose any attempts to expand unilateral military advantages in the name of arms control. The US commitment does not mention the development, production, deployment, or use of such weapons, nor activities that could threaten or disrupt the normal operation of satellites. It is totally insufficient to address the security challenges in outer space. The scope of the PPWT is much broader than the US initiative, and provide a clear and effective solution to space security that covers the direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing. We call for the country concerned to stop using pretexts to block treaty negotiations on PAROS and join the negotiation process with a responsible attitude.

Third, a balance should be struck between space security and the peaceful use of outer space. The equal rights of all countries of the peaceful use of outer space, particularly the interest of developing countries and emerging space-faring countries, should be respected and ensured. We should promote international exchanges, technical assistance and cooperation, promote the universal and shared benefit of outer space technological development, and promote peaceful use of outer space as a strong drive of economic and social development of all. Ideological bias, double standards and unilateral sanctions should be abandoned, political divides and technical barriers should be removed, and abuses of such pretext as security threats to hamper the peaceful use of outer space should be avoided.

I also wish to take this opportunity to discuss the issue of regulating the participation of commercial space enterprises in outer space military activities. The

commercial space institutions of some states have participated in military space activities on a large scale, which has accelerated arms expansion in outer space and blurred the boundary between military and civil activities. Yesterday morning, Professor David A. Koplow from Georgetown University quoted Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty (OST). China believes that countries should strictly abide by the OST and earnestly assume their supervisory responsibility. They need to take action to strengthen supervision and management of commercial space activities in their countries to avoid accidents and unconventional behaviors that may exacerbate confrontations and conflicts in outer space. In the meantime, they should require their commercial space enterprises to properly use telecom-spectrum and orbital resources in outer space so as not to undermine the rights of the developing countries to the peaceful uses of outer space.

Four, upholding multilateralism and seeking comprehensive and coordinated solutions. We should support the UN playing a central role as the main platform for outer space governance, and ensure the extensive participation, justice and inclusiveness in related international rule-making, build widest possible international consensus, and avoid imposing the wills of some countries upon others. Relevant UN agencies have their own mandates and focus. Therefore, necessary coordination and cooperation are needed, and efforts should be made to avoid excessive overlapping and confusion.

The Chinese delegation has submitted two working papers to the OEWG, which introduce the proposals and positions of China in a comprehensive and extensive manner. We welcome all parties to refer to the documents on the website of the Secretariat. My team and I would like to participate in the OEWG work in an active, constructive and responsible manner. We will also tentatively listen to the views and proposals from other delegations. China would like to explore the fundamental and effective ways together with the international community to address the threats to space security, and make contributions to the lasting peace and security in outer space.