

Open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours, as convened under United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/231

First Session

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Statement by Ireland

Chair,

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union and would like to add the following remarks in a national capacity. I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of your role as chair of this Open Ended Working Group and I assure you of Ireland's full support.

Today, we are all increasingly reliant on space systems and services for our security, including for the effective functioning of our economies and for the wellbeing of our societies. Satellites and other space-based assets, their corresponding ground segments, and their associated signals play a vital role in our everyday lives. They are also essential for progress in meeting the world's biggest challenges such as combatting climate change and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The rapid growth in human space-activity in recent years, coupled with the increased diversity of space operators, means it is even more important to avoid potentially harmful interference with the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, and to facilitate equitable access to outer space. In this context, full compliance with existing international law, combined with a commitment by all actors to responsible behaviour, including by enhancing transparency and confidence building measures, is an essential starting point. We welcome the opportunity afforded by this Open Ended Working Group to intensify efforts to address challenges in outer space, with the involvement of all UN Member States as well as multi-stakeholder engagement with, International Organisations, the private sector and civil society.

Ireland remains strongly committed to the prevention of an arms race in outer space and to the preservation of a safe, secure and sustainable space environment and the peaceful use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis for all.

Chair

Space is a global common good, and it requires global rules. Ireland stresses the importance of conducting space activities in accordance with international law. The United Nations Charter, the principal UN Treaties on Outer Space, in particular the Outer Space Treaty itself, and International Humanitarian Law constitute the cornerstone of international law applicable to Outer Space. The principles recognised by the UN General Assembly, as well as other related documents and resolutions adopted by it, also contribute to existing norms and standards of behaviour for the peaceful use of Outer Space. It is Ireland's firm view that space activities must take place within a multilateral rules-based system.

The Outer Space Treaty affirms that international law applies to activities in the exploration and use of outer space. The Outer Space Treaty recognises the common interest of all in the progress of the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. If new legally-binding instruments or other norms, rules and principles are to be developed, they must be consistent with and should build on and strengthen the existing legal framework, including IHL

Space diplomacy has established several important norms, including the non-use of weapons of mass destruction in outer space and the protection of satellites used to monitor treaty compliance against purposeful, harmful interference. However, there are notable gaps, including the testing and use of destructive methods against satellites. This is of particular concern to my delegation since such tests could produce large debris fields that indiscriminately endanger satellites and other space operations for many decades, and could have severe consequences for civilians.

The development and proliferation of anti-satellite weapons, including those launched from the earth should be addressed by this OEWG. There are particular risks associated with these weapons including the generation of long-lived debris. Apart from the possible effects of such kinetic ASAT activities, such tests are dangerous and highly destabilising, and could lead to a deterioration of confidence between space actors and increase the perception of threats. All

States should refrain from launching anti-satellite weapons and furthermore Ireland supports the development of legally binding rules on these weapons systems.

Chair,

For the implementation of norms, rules and principles to be effective there must be trust and confidence between all space actors. Ireland is supportive of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space activities, in particular those contained in the 2013 report of the group of governmental experts (A/68/189). It would be useful if this OEWG could give consideration to how existing TCBMs could be strengthened, including those elements which form part of the existing legal framework and to the further elaboration of TCBMs and how they could be applied.

Chair,

In the words of former UNSG Boutros Boutros-Ghali *“Outer space is an inherently multilateral domain. If we are to continue to take advantage of the invaluable resources that outer space provides, it is critically important for all nations to work collectively to keep it free from destabilizing conflict and to make it safe, secure and sustainable in the long term for the benefit of all humankind.”* While outer space affords us great opportunities, increased reliance on the space domain also comes with increased vulnerability. Promoting the safety, security and sustainability across the full range of space activities is vital to safeguard the continued peaceful use of outer space and prevent outer space from becoming a zone of conflict. While working towards the development of legally binding agreements, Ireland believes that voluntary measures constitute a pragmatic way forward at the moment, starting with norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours, through an inclusive process.

Thank You