



UK Mission  
Geneva

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

**EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THE OUTCOME OF THE FIRST SESSION AND  
OUTLOOK TOWARDS THE SECOND SESSION**

**STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM**

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament  
Geneva, 13 May 2022

Mr Chair

Let me begin by joining others in paying tribute to the way you have prepared for and steered our work this week. My delegation welcomes the interesting and interactive discussion with experts and amongst delegations. The structure of our work and the selection of briefers has been highly conducive to a deep and rich discussion. There have been many specific ideas proposed, and we have lots of food for thought ahead of our next session in September.

This has of course been the first meeting of new process set up by the UN General Assembly pursuant to the mandate set out in resolution 76/231. That resolution and mandate builds on the excellent report by the Secretary General pursuant to resolution 75/36. This is a comprehensive and multilateral process, open to all States, the goal of which is the PAROS; the specific aim is to include in our pursuit of that goal a wide range of threats, in-orbit and from the Earth, and to avoid miscalculation and escalation that could lead to conflict. One key innovation of this group is its focus on behaviours as a means of addressing threats to space systems to achieve the prevention of an arms race. Space systems are crucial for national, regional and global security and stability, and attacks against any of the four segments that they comprise harm international security, as well as the need to keep outer space open and accessible to all.

Allow me to share four general reflections on the discussions this week.

First, we have had useful exchanges about the scope of this body's work and how it intersects with that of others. We agree with the view that risks (e.g. accidents) and dangers/hazards (e.g. space weather) fall under the heading of 'safety', not 'security', and are more suited to discussion within COPUOUS. States' space systems enable

them to deliver prosperity, development and security. But the intentional development, testing and potential use of capabilities and techniques by States to target the space systems of other States threaten all of these and should be discussed in this forum.

Second, we have heard many references to the need for space to be used for exclusively peaceful uses. Let us be clear: Militaries operate in space, and have done so since beginning of space exploration – and the use of space by militaries is not, of itself, incompatible with the idea of peaceful use. The responsible behaviours approach can help ensure space continues to be used for peaceful purposes by reducing the risk of aggression, which might arise from misunderstandings and miscalculations, both in space and on Earth.

Third, we acknowledge that many delegations have reiterated their firm support for legally binding mechanisms to address space security issues. We welcome that some delegations emphasised the requirement for legally binding instruments to be verifiable, and expressed the view that the responsible behaviours approach could both support the development of future legally binding instruments and complement existing and future legal frameworks.

Fourth, we reiterate our hope that the process of States developing and agreeing norms and principles of responsible behaviours can mitigate threats, and that the outcome of that process could be crystallised into legally binding rules in due course. In the meantime, collective understandings on what constitutes responsible behaviour will contribute to building trust and transparency, and to collective self-restraint in the development and deployment of capabilities.

Having listened carefully to all views expressed throughout the week, we remain convinced that the focus of the OEWG on responsible behaviours is a promising avenue for the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mr Chair

The focus of our work this week has been on taking stock of the existing international legal and other normative frameworks concerning threats arising from State behaviours with respect to outer space. We have heard from a number of policy, academic and legal experts, as well as a large number of delegations expressing a wide range of views. It has been a stimulating, fruitful, constructive and timely discussion, and my delegation is grateful for the engagement of all who have contributed to it.

It is clear international law applies to activities of states in outer space, including the UN Charter and customary international law - and we welcome the helpful discussions on a wide range of elements of the existing legal framework.

There has been widespread agreement amongst experts and member states that the laws of armed conflict apply in outer space and that all States must comply with them. The responsible behaviours approach can help avoid conflict in the first place and spare us from situations where there is a necessity to determine how the requirements of the law of armed conflict would apply, noting that LOAC imposes limits on the conduct of armed conflict, through applicable principles such as distinction, proportionality and so on, which we have heard is highly challenging in a space context.

It is also clear, however, that there are a number of activities or scenarios which would not clearly be prohibited under existing international law, but which could nevertheless be threatening to space systems or to international peace and security, and would therefore be undesirable or irresponsible. As a number of speakers have noted, we can either bury our heads in the sand and wish away the risk of space conflict, or we can consider how international law applies to activities in space that might be carried out in the furtherance of an armed conflict - with the aim of ensuring that conflict does not occur.

There was also an interesting discussion on the lessons to be learned from the legal framework that applies to the air and the sea. These are very broad frameworks and it is important that we focus in this group on finding practical ideas from mechanisms that help address threats by reducing risks of misinterpretation and miscalculation leading to conflict.

We believe the discussions this week have emphasised that an extensive body of obligations under international law already exists, and that States must comply with those obligations. In this OEWG we have an opportunity to build on the legal framework through the creation of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour, and that is the task that we must turn our efforts to over the rest of this OEWG

Mr Chair

Finally, my delegation looks forward to the next session in September, which will focus on current and future threats to space systems. We have already heard this afternoon that this discussion is timely and urgent. We welcome the approach you have just set out, which has served us well this week. We hope this session will be useful in increasing our collective understanding of the full range of threats to space systems and point the way towards developing norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours to manage and reduce those threats, building on the existing legal foundations, in line with the mandate of the group.

My thanks once again, Mr Chair. We look forward to working with you in the intersessional period and at our next meeting in September.

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