

**U.S. Statement to the
Open Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and
Principles of Responsible Behavior
As Delivered by Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric Desautels
May 9, 2022**

Mr. Chairman, let me first congratulate you on your election as Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group and let me also assure you of the United States' support for your efforts. The United States looks forward to working with you on this incredibly important issue, and is committed to a successful outcome of this process.

I also want to take a moment to reiterate the United States' strong support for the Ukrainian Government and Ukrainian people, in its fight for its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Mr. Chairman, as this group meets to discuss developing norms of responsible behavior related to national security space systems and counterspace systems, we must be cognizant about the revolutionary, world changing events that are going on in outer space. From weather forecasting, to navigating, to communicating, space has become an essential tool driving prosperity and security for all States.

In order to preserve these advances and reduce the risks to the outer space environment from anti-satellite weapons, and to reduce the risks of miscalculation and misinterpretation leading to conflict, it is essential that we take a comprehensive approach to addressing these threats.

The irrefutable fact is that over the last several years we have seen a number of ground-based anti-satellite missile tests destroy satellites on orbit. We have seen space-based services like navigation satellites and communications satellites being jammed or subject to malicious cyber activities. And over the years there have been exchanges of accusations about the placement of weapons in outer space. Despite these developments, tests and accusations, the international community has not come together to address these issues in a comprehensive manner.

And this is not just a problem for major space-faring nations. It is a security issue for all nations. The debris created from a deliberate destructive anti-satellite missile test does not discriminate.

In that regard, I would like to make a few remarks on an important commitment the United States announced recently regarding destructive, direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing.

Mr. Chairman, one of the most pressing threats facing satellites, and especially to those humans operating on spacecraft in orbit around this planet, comes from the deliberate destruction of satellites caused by the testing of direct-ascent anti-satellite missiles. As a direct result of the force with which these anti-satellite missiles strike a satellite, the target satellite is instantly obliterated into thousands of pieces that range in size from the trackable to the untrackable, and will spread out over time, eventually forming a ring around the planet, becoming a greater and greater hazard to launch systems and satellites using those affected orbits.

Continued, unrestricted testing of these systems, including by an increasing number of States, would only further pollute the outer space environment with large volumes of debris and complicate the ability of all States to operate there.

That is why on April 18th, U.S. Vice President Harris [announced](#) that the United States commits not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests. The United States believes that the risk from this type of testing is too serious, and that we should stop this activity altogether. Creating debris in space through this type of destructive ASAT missile test is in no-one's interest.

We believe that this commitment is the right initial step given the damage to the outer space environment from such tests. If broadly adhered to, such a commitment could provide the confidence or even proof that we can make progress in this important area, while radically reducing the threats to the outer space environment from such tests. We urge other States to look carefully at the language in this commitment.

The United States believes that this language is understandable, clear, and improves the stability of the outer space environment. We welcome any nation, including Russia, China and India, to also recognize that it is in no-one's interest to conduct further destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests and to join in this commitment. To be clear, we do not see this as the only step for us to take in this OEWG in order to enhance international security and to strengthen security in outer space.

The United States recognizes that this commitment is limited. It does not cover all ASAT threats, including space-based ASAT systems nor does it involve the elimination of any weapons, something we believe would be challenging from a definitional and verification perspective. Nevertheless, we believe that it is an important first step in protecting the outer space environment for the use of outer space by all States. And as history has shown, establishing a principle as a norm or responsible behavior first as a non-binding commitment can eventually lead to its inclusion in future legally-binding agreements.

As our work proceeds in this OEWG, we would welcome thoughts from the States gathered here as to how we could best multilateralize this commitment. And to be clear, debris produced by an anti-satellite missile is an issue for this group to discuss.

We hope that by pursuing such a commitment as a norm of responsible behavior at this OEWG, we can focus on the most pressing threat, while at the same time showing that progress can be achieved. At the same time, it is important to carefully assess other areas where we can make progress. We believe that it is through this discussion here at this OEWG, that we can develop ideas to address the many other challenges resulting from actions that threaten the security of space systems.

And so we look forward over the course of these conversations to discussing how we establish a better understanding of behaviors that can enhance the stability in the outer space environment.

Thank you.