Chair,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election to chair this OEWG, and to thank you, Mr. Chair, for your significant efforts in preparing this session.

Norway welcomes the commencement of the first substantial session of the open ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour.

Norway is convinced that consideration of the three substantive points listed in agenda item 6 will contribute to a way forward in support of preventing an arms race in outer space.

Space security is a matter of global importance and of increasing urgency – and in need of multilateral solutions. Norway’s primary objective in taking part in these discussions is to contribute to avoiding conflicts related to outer space.

As all states rely on space systems, they all have a stake in space security. Moreover, non-governmental actors also have important interests in space. This underlines the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach, with the attendance of international organisations, commercial actors and civil society representatives.

The initiative from resolutions 75/36 and 76/231 for a reduction of space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour offers a way forward for a discussion that has become entrenched by differing opinions on form. This working group gives us a space to discuss substance without predetermining whether the outcome should be towards a binding instrument or some other normative framework.

To this end, the concept of responsible behaviour offers a more comprehensive approach to maintaining security in outer space than a narrow emphasis on weapons in space and kinetic threats to space systems. In our view, the recent decision of the United States, and now more states, not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing conforms to a norm of responsible behaviour that deserves wider adoption. Norway welcomes these decisions.

States should consider the kinds of acts that may be perceived irresponsible or threatening, not merely the capabilities with which these acts are performed. The working group offers a contemporary
approach to preventing an arms race in outer space because it is concerned not only with the placement of weapons in space, but with the security of space systems as a whole. To Norway, that appears to offer a fruitful way forward.

Taking stock of the relevant existing international legal and other normative frameworks is also key to moving forward. As reflected in article III of the Outer Space Treaty, international law, including the UN Charter, applies to the conduct of states in outer space. Most fundamentally, this includes the obligation of states to refrain from the threat or use of force against another state. In the event of armed conflict related to outer space, article III of the Outer Space Treaty must also be taken to encompass international humanitarian law. Norway is mindful of all these obligations.

Any intentional disruption, damage or destruction of a space system can present a potential threat to international security. Particular risks apply in the event of physical damage to, or the destruction of, an orbital component, where the resulting space debris may increase the risk of damage to other spacecraft. The dual-use nature of many space systems further complicates the issue: a space system may have both civilian and military uses, and the disruption of a military capability may also affect critical civilian services. In case of conflict, this calls to attention the responsibility of states to protect civilian persons and objects, as well as the principles of humanity, necessity, distinction, and proportionality.

Our objective must be to prevent threatening and irresponsible activities in space. However, in the case of an incident, rules and principles of responsible behaviour should also contribute to finding ways to manage such incidents, for example through guidelines for action to help prevent the escalation of a situation.

As a steadfast proponent of seeking multilateral solutions to global challenges, Norway looks forward to taking part in these discussions.

Unfortunately, our session takes place against the backdrop of Russia’s illegal and unprovoked attack on Ukraine assisted by Belarus. The attack remains a flagrant breach of the most fundamental rules of international relations. We repeat our call for the Russian federation to withdraw its troops and stop its aggression against Ukraine.

Thank you