



UK Mission
Geneva

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

**Exchange of views on the outcome of the second session and outlook
towards the third session**

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 16 September 2022

Mr Chair,

May I firstly join others in warmly thanking you for the skilful and patient way in which you have steered our work this week.

As this second session ends, it is right that we step back and reflect on what we have learned so far, and consider how this can help us make progress towards fulfilling the mandate of our OEWG.

The United Kingdom takes a good deal of encouragement from our discussions these last five days.

We welcome the open, thoughtful and constructive way in which so many delegations have engaged (including through the medium of high-heeled shoes, smiley face emojis, and un-notified 'on-stage' rendez-vous operations).

Mr Chair, this conversation between states on what they each find threatening in the activities, action and omissions of other states, is – in and of itself – an important transparency and confidence building measure.

We have heard that there are, inevitably, differing threat perceptions. What one state might consider a security-building activity, may raise suspicion or the prospect of a threat in the eyes of another state.

As our Canadian colleague reminded us, this subjectivity is precisely what our work is designed to overcome.

By agreeing on what constitutes normal, responsible behaviour, we can bring objectivity and a common basis on which to address security concerns.

The first step is to understand what each of us finds threatening. We have learned much this week about the wide range of concerns that states have regarding threats to space systems.

Kinetic and non-kinetic threats; threats to all segments of space systems; capabilities that could be misused or misunderstood if used in a certain way; behaviours that should be considered irresponsible; activities that could be misinterpreted; space policies, strategies and doctrines that are opaque or deemed by some to be provocative.

This dialogue, and the enhanced understanding that it allows, will stand us in good stead for the important discussions ahead of us.

Mr Chair,

Our discussions to date in this OEWG have confirmed the importance of the current legal and normative framework; and, that additional measures are required to address the challenges of rapid technological change and increasingly intense competition between states.

As we said in our opening statement, it is this reality and complexity of the security environment that we must take as our starting point. States are contesting space to gain advantage; and states are seeking to counter the advantages that space affords to their competitors.

As is widely recognised, legally binding instruments are not the only measure at our disposal to ensure that competition between states does not inadvertently spill over into conflict.

Voluntary norms of behaviour, combined with enhanced mutual understanding, dialogue and transparency, and strengthened SSA, can help to reduce risks of misunderstanding and unintended escalation.

We also take encouragement from the fact that we seem finally to be moving beyond the binary debates – between legally binding and non-legally binding – that have hampered progress under PAROS for too many years.

There is increasing recognition that agreements on behavioural norms can be valuable steps towards the eventual negotiation of legally binding instruments.

As our Philippines colleague said, there is no contradiction between the rule of law and the development of voluntary norms. Indeed, the history of arms control shows that many arms control agreements have enshrined norms previously adopted in resolutions and other so-called soft-law instruments.

Mr Chair,

As many delegations have noted, it is essential that this process remains inclusive and takes account of the interests of all states. The UK fully agrees, and that is the very purpose of our Open-Ended Working Group, working by consensus.

We have heard that many states want to avoid a selective approach to new norms. The UK agrees with this too, and encourages all delegations to suggest measures that would help ensure a balanced approach across the work of our group.

That said, if we are to make progress, and truly unblock the deadlock of recent years, it is important that we proceed step-by-step. We must take action where we can, to address the most pressing threats. In doing so we can put in place building blocks that provide 'proof of concept', and a solid foundation for future measures.

In conclusion,

This week has provided us with a great deal of food thought. We all now have an intensive period of work ahead of us, in which to develop concrete proposals. We look forward to seeing you and everyone here again in January, and continuing these vital discussions.

* * *