

Joint Civil Society Statement on Outer Space 2022

Thank-you Chair,

The immense social, economic, political and planetary benefits provided by space systems are widely understood. An illustration of these benefits is, in fact, currently on display at the Space 4 Our Planet exhibit within this very building. These benefits – which depend on the ability of all to have sustainable, safe, and secure access to and use of outer space – are underpinned by peace.

Yet, despite long-standing efforts rooted in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty to preserve outer space and celestial bodies as peaceful domains free of weapons, threats to peace are increasing.

We know that harmful interference with satellites – including the jamming of satellite communications, dazzling of their sensors, and digital intrusions, with the aim of disrupting their normal functioning – is on the rise.

We have witnessed states demonstrate a destructive anti-satellite missile capability using ground-based weapons systems as recently as last year. There is evidence that the development of other anti-satellite capabilities such as directed energy weapons is accelerating. Anti-satellite capabilities based in space are also a possibility.

Many other advanced technological capabilities and activities are being developed with the potential to be both helpful and harmful. In the absence of transparency and agreed upon rules for their use, the risk of unintentional conflict due to misunderstandings is great, and the potential remains for such capabilities to be used for weapons purposes.

These risks affect all life on our planet today as well as future generations. War in space would threaten the thousands of satellites that provide essential social and economic services to civilians all around the world. It risks mass contamination of an already-fragile outer space environment. And it has the potential to spill over into war here on Earth, including possible nuclear escalation.

Even actions short of destructive violence could be catastrophic for some. As with all armed conflict, the consequences of damage or disruption to essential space systems are unequal, creating different and disproportionate impacts based on gender, race, and socio-economic status.

Support for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space remains near unanimous at this Committee. The challenge before us is how to translate this commitment into concrete actions that support enduring peace and security for all.

This year, a new dialogue on norms of responsible behaviour in outer space has begun under a UN-mandated Open Ended Working Group. Rooted in existing international law and norms, the objective of this Working Group is to recommend additional rules, principles, and norms of responsible behaviour, including how they might contribute to the negotiation of legally binding instruments. Both the depth and breadth of participation thus far is encouraging, and we urge more states to join the discussion.

New resolutions are also before us, including one that builds on the growing momentum of voluntary commitments not to conduct destructive tests of ground-based, direct-ascent anti-satellite missiles. Not only do such tests contaminate the space environment with dangerous and indiscriminate space debris, but they also contribute to the political dynamics of arms racing. This initiative represents ‘low-hanging

fruit' that is one of many positive new practical and observable commitments needed to rebuild trust, confidence, and cooperation as the foundation for peace and arms control in outer space.

All states have a common interest in and need for assured and sustainable access to and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. We thus urge states to:

1. Reaffirm that the use of outer space is intended for the benefit and interests of all, and that outer space should not be a warfighting domain.
2. Commit to the continued work of the Open-Ended Working Group on responsible behaviour in space, including the identification of possible contributions to future legally-binding instruments, and consider how core principles such as due regard can be put into practice.
3. Join or support the initiative to develop a multilateral moratorium on destructive tests of ground-based, direct-ascent anti-satellite capabilities as a step toward new arms control measures in outer space, and a linkage between behavioural rules and weapons restraint.
4. Identify additional new practical and observable commitments that states can make to rebuild trust, confidence, and cooperation in outer space.
5. Consider ways to better implement existing commitments to transparency and confidence-building.

Beyond this forum, states should follow declared commitments with concrete action by:

1. Refraining from activities that deliberately damage or destroy any space asset.
2. Not developing, testing, or deploying capabilities for use as weapons in outer space and not testing or using harmful capabilities to target space systems.
3. Providing greater transparency about military space doctrines, capabilities, and activities.
4. Demonstrating behaviours that contribute to trust and confidence and avoid those that may be perceived as hostile.
5. Adopting national legislation and regulations to ensure that space activities are consistent with international law, norms, and voluntary commitments.

Chair, we must swiftly address the creeping crisis of harmful use of capabilities, deteriorating confidence in space activities, resist political stalemates, and embrace collaboration in order to truly reaffirm the immense global value arising from our shared use of outer space.

Thank-you.

Signatories:

Project Ploughshares

Canadian Pugwash Group

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

BASIC

PAX

Rideau Institute

Observer Research Foundation

Australian Centre for Space Governance

Aotearoa Lawyers for Peace

Basel Peace Office

Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament

World Future Council

Youth Fusion