

OPENING REMARKS

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It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you all to the Palais des Nations. I am grateful for the opportunity to continue our good tradition of coming together for this annual conference. Allow me first of all to congratulate the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research for establishing this highly valuable forum for discussion of space security issues.

This year, the debates will centre on two anniversaries—the fiftieth anniversary of the advent of the space age, and the fortieth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty.

Since the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I—the world’s first Earth-orbiting artificial satellite—on 4 October 1957, hundreds of satellites and other space objects, including probes, shuttles and space stations, have been put into orbit. As we can clearly see in our daily lives, peaceful cooperation in outer space has—over the past fifty years—given an unprecedented boost to the development of revolutionary new technologies that benefit all countries. As the title of this seminar suggests, there is much reason to celebrate the space age.

As space technologies have entered our lives, we have become increasingly dependent on them. And with this collective dependence has come a growing sense of shared vulnerability. Indeed, any interruption of the use of outer space could significantly disrupt our day-to-day activities. After a half-century of growth, the number of space objects has increased exponentially, and the space environment has grown more unstable. These developments only add to the feeling of vulnerability.

Yet, nothing is more alarming than the prospect of a military conflict in outer space. For the past four decades, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty has been the cornerstone of international space law. The treaty was—at the time when it was concluded—a great historic achievement, and it still is. The strategic—and at the same time, noble and peaceful—idea behind the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 was to prevent the extension of an arms race into outer space.

Initially, the world was given some hope for the full demilitarization of outer space. Later, it came to be only partial demilitarization. Now, we are again witnessing a militarization of outer space. The very principle of the peaceful use of outer space—a cornerstone of strategic stability—is in question, especially given the scrapping of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and plans to develop new outer space weapons. In this respect, developments in outer space are a reflection of the political and military situation here on Earth. Yet, militarization of outer space undermines the strategic stability of all countries.

The Outer Space Treaty prohibits only the deployment of weapons of mass destruction in outer space. It does not deal with conventional weapons. It bans military activities on the Moon and other celestial bodies, but is silent about such activities in outer space. These gaps—combined with major scientific innovation since the completion of the treaty—raise serious questions as to whether the current international legal framework is robust enough to prevent outer space from becoming an arena for military competition.

As Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, I hope that this unique disarmament negotiating body will not only discuss—but also make progress on—the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space—known as PAROS in the disarmament community. As most of you will be aware, the Conference concluded the first part of its 2007 session only last week, at the end of March. This event is thus an occasion to review and evaluate the work of the Conference on Disarmament concerning PAROS during this first part. If the present proposal by the Six Presidents—the “P6 proposal”—is adopted, the Conference will be able to move ahead, also in the critical area of PAROS. Following the discussions on Friday, the Conference is set to have a Special Session in April 2007. I hope that the Conference will adopt the proposal, which would allow it to become—again—a main organ for peace and security.

During the recent high-level segment of the Conference, several speakers referred to the importance of moving ahead on the issue of PAROS. I believe that Members of the Conference have managed to deepen their understanding of the status of space security, the existing legal regime and the proposed treaty prohibiting placement of weapons in outer space through the in-depth discussions held over the past two months.

Nevertheless, the discussions have also highlighted that considerable differences remain in the views of the Members regarding the current legal regime and the approach to space security. More importantly, I observed a degree of mutual suspicion and a lack of trust among the Members. It is therefore critical for the Members of the Conference on Disarmament to build trust and confidence to allay these concerns and dispel any suspicions. Confidence building and consultations are indeed prerequisites for finding a universal approach to space security—indeed to any matter of security—and for reaching consensus on negotiating a new international treaty.

One of the most effective ways to build trust and confidence is to enter into international partnerships in space exploration and expand the scope of international cooperation in outer space. It is therefore a positive development that space exploration today has become in many respects a truly international enterprise. Who could have predicted in 1957, for example, that Americans and Russians, along with nationals from many different countries, would actually be living and working together on the International Space Station? In this way, outer space has been an example of peaceful globalization. I hope it will stay that way.

As civilian and military activities in outer space are becoming less distinct, our engagement with the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space becomes increasingly important. So, in this regard, I will welcome the inclusion in this conference of the perspectives of this Committee.

In view of recent developments, today's conference is most timely. It provides a welcome opportunity to analyse the current situation of space security, take stock of the Outer Space Treaty and other relevant instruments, and examine the need for any additional measures to ensure the peaceful use of outer space.

I have no doubt that you will have many constructive—and forthright, I hope—exchanges over the next two days, and that you will help advance our collective efforts toward greater space security.

I wish you all the best in your discussions.