



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Statement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

delivered by

H.E. Robert in den Bosch
Permanent Representative
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Conference on
Disarmament and Ambassador at large

at the

Seventy-Seventh Session of the General Assembly
First Committee

Outer Space (disarmament aspects)

New York, 25 October 2022

Chair,

In addition to the statement delivered by the European Union, the Netherlands would like to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Outer space shall be the province of all humankind. This principle is at the core of Article I of the Outer Space Treaty. It is more relevant than ever, given the increasing number of new space actors and users of space services. Space-based applications are being utilized daily by a huge proportion of the global population. It is essential that all states will be able to benefit from the economic and societal opportunities inherent to the space domain, now and for generations to come. A safe, secure, and sustainable outer space is thus of vital importance and a responsibility for us all.

Space governance is founded on the five UN outer space treaties. This very month we celebrate the fact that 55 years ago, the Outer Space Treaty entered into force and became the constitutional document for human activities in outer space. In addition, the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines are crucial for safeguarding safety and sustainability in space.

Yet, we see that space security governance is falling behind developments in other domains. Now, at the dawn of a new space age, the moment is there for an urgently required leap forward. We must reduce risks from inadvertent escalation, by improving the governance of outer space. We believe that this can be done via a step-by-step approach based on responsible behaviour, towards a possible legally binding instrument in the future.

Such agreements are only viable if they are supported by relevant monitoring capabilities and verification measures. The Netherlands would

like to highlight the potential of space surveillance and tracking in this context to enhance compliance with such agreements.

Chair,

Weaponization of space has harmful consequences that can affect the use of space for economic, social, scientific and security purposes and could precipitate substantial humanitarian costs. Apart from the legitimate ethical and security concerns shared by many in this forum, such activities are unsustainable as they increase the likelihood of losing access to space. We therefore remain committed to the prevention of an arms race in outer space and stress the need for further practical measures. Such measures should be gender responsive as well as inclusive, taking into account the more vulnerable position of women and marginalized groups and ensuring diverse representation by women and people of diverse backgrounds in decision-making.

The inherent dual use and dual-purpose nature of space objects complicate the discussion on weaponization. As any space object could be used as a space weapon, approaches solely focussing on capabilities are unfeasible and are detrimental to the use of space for technological or social-economic development. Instead, addressing irresponsible behaviour will automatically address capabilities regardless of their definition, thereby preventing the upward spiral towards an arms race in outer space. In this regard, the current Open Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats has demonstrated its relevance as a forum to discuss this issue. We note that this year, the Conference on Disarmament decided to establish a Subsidiary Body on PAROS. We look forward to future discussions in this body and believe it would be premature now to initiate any further parallel processes.

A fundamental prerequisite for a safe, secure, and sustainable outer space is to minimize the creation of space debris. We therefore co-sponsor the US resolution calling on countries not to conduct destructive

direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests. In our view this initiative is a first pragmatic step to enshrine voluntary commitments in a future legally binding instrument. Such instrument could eventually further expand its scope beyond testing by addressing the behavioural aspect of not deliberately destroying objects in space in a comprehensive manner.

Chair,

We believe that the continued international discussions on outer space, here in New York as well as in Vienna and Geneva, can result in constructive and concrete proposals that encourage UN Member States, spacefaring or not, to realise a sustainable, safe, and secure space domain. The Netherlands remains fully committed to this endeavour.