



**UNGA 77 - First Committee Thematic Debate  
Cluster 3 - Outer Space**

**Statement by Mr. Sugeeshwara Gunaratna  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka  
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Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor. Sri Lanka aligns itself with the statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and wish to make the following observations in our national capacity.

Sri Lanka's position on the peaceful uses of outer space and its commitment to prevention of an arms race and weaponization of outer space has been clear and consistent and dates back to the 1980s when in collaboration with like-minded countries we called for the preservation of outer space as a common heritage of mankind. We might recall that one of the major questions presented to UN COPUOS was the legal status of outer space. The preamble of the UNGA Res 2222 of 19th December 1966 reaffirmed 'the importance of developing the rule of law in this new era of human endeavor'. Although the satellites were placed in orbit without permission of other States, there were no significant protests though it had infringed on a country's 'sovereignty' as it circled the earth. This was an acknowledgment that this new frontier did not have the elements of sovereignty under the principles of international law as in the case of land, sea and airspace. Mr. Chairman, there is a substantial body of law dealing with various aspects of the use and exploration of outer space such as the UN space treaties, general assembly resolutions, bilateral arrangements, determinations by intergovernmental organizations, national legislation and decisions of national courts. This jurisprudence needs to be developed further for the common benefit of humankind.

Sri Lanka therefore rejects any doctrine that seeks to categorize space as a “war fighting domain” or “the next battlefield” as such doctrines are based purely on the desire to dominate and exploit without recognizing that all of us are mere creatures on planet earth, a minuscule celestial body, in comparison to the vast expanse of the universe.

Mr. Chairman

Today, we live in an interconnected world where technologies, including space technologies, and the services they provide have an overarching reach and reliability and are used not only by those states that have the capacity for space-faring. Accordingly, conflict in space affects not just the space-faring nations but all of us and must be avoided lest its catastrophic consequences befall us all.

A desire for a legally binding instrument on PAROS has been expressed by a large majority of delegations in this forum and elsewhere over the years. Sri Lanka, along with Egypt, has traditionally sponsored a resolution on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and will do so this time as well. It is our expectation that the resolution this year will continue to garner wide support from delegations as in previous years. We remain fully committed to this goal and re-emphasizes the urgent need for the commencement of substantive work on the subject in the Conference on Disarmament, including through the establishment of an ad-hoc committee.

In this regard, Sri Lanka believes that the draft Treaty presented jointly by Russia and China at the Conference on Disarmament on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008 and updated in 2014 needs to be taken into account along with the discussions of the Group of Governmental Experts established pursuant to GA Resolution 72/250. It is regrettable that consensus on the draft final report of the GGE was blocked by a state party.

While there is common understanding regarding the applicability of international law including the UN Charter and IHL to outer space, it is clear that the existing legal framework should be strengthened to respond to unprecedented challenges caused by the developments such as advancement of space technologies, proliferation of actors and

activities in space as well as dual use of space infrastructure. A war in space cannot be won and must not be fought. The only way to prevent a possible arms race in outer space is to develop comprehensive binding regulations to address current threats to safety and security of outer space. It is important that such regulations are based on and strengthen the existing legal framework on outer space which remains applicable and relevant to date.

We remain concerned over the implications of continued development and deployment of anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense systems that erodes trust, escalates mutual suspicion and creates an international climate that threatens international security. In addition to our own resolution on PAROS, Sri Lanka welcomes the GA resolutions that aim to promote the peaceful uses of Outer Space including the resolutions on 'No first placement of weapons in Outer Space' and 'Transparency and Confidence Building Measures in Outer Space activities'. There is also the problem of space debris which poses a significant risk to operations in outer space. We must avoid the phenomenon of the 'Kessler syndrome' as envisaged if we are to preserve humanity's capacity to use the Earth's orbit.

Mr. Chairman,

While we welcome the ongoing deliberations relating to norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours in outer space as a useful measure on enhancing common understanding, it is imperative that these deliberations lead towards the eventual establishment of international legal instruments and provide binding limitations on potential weaponization of outer space. Such norms, principles and responsible behaviors should be an interim step towards the negotiation and development of a comprehensive legally binding treaty on PAROS and the common understanding and progress achieved by a near majority of states on this issue should not be disregarded.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka supports any initiative towards promotion of peaceful and safe use of outer space and welcomes the recent commitment by several states not to conduct direct-

ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) missile testing which we believe is a positive initial step in the right direction.

Mr. Chairman

In conclusion, we reiterate the need for multilateralism to come to the fore in carving out a sustainable legal framework that would serve to prevent the imminent possibility of a catastrophic arms race in Outer Space and secure a peaceful Outer Space for our future generations. We believe that it is incumbent on all stakeholders to charter a course forward in order to meet the challenges of the 22nd century. We are now in the era of a cold peace. This century has presented us with new spacefaring, with companies and individuals having the capacity to utilize space technology without the confines of an industry that is regulated. The need therefore to find and craft an appropriate regulatory regime is an imperative. It is our belief that the development of customary international law in relation to space specific principles in the long term would create more binding obligations and decrease the current threat that space assets pose to global security. Mr. Chairman, until the mature and responsible regulatory framework for space is put in place we must remain conscious of and continue to hold onto the fundamental sentiment of 'humanity' that underpins space law in order to avoid scenarios that would be beyond our imagination.

Thank you.