

**Statement by Ambassador Robert A. Wood
Delegation of the United States of America**

**71st UNGA First Committee
Thematic Discussion on Outer Space (Disarmament Aspects)**

October 19, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the First Committee's Thematic Discussion on Outer Space today. The United States continues its long-standing commitment to ensuring the long-term sustainability, stability, safety, and security of the space environment. Addressing the challenges of orbital congestion, collision avoidance, and responsible and peaceful behavior in space are the responsibilities of all who are engaged in space activities. How we address these challenges is an important question for discussion within the UN General Assembly's First Committee as well as the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and elsewhere.

In considering options for international cooperation to ensure space security and sustainability, some States continue to pursue legally binding arms control agreements that are unlikely to be timely, equitable, or effective. For reasons that we have raised many times, the United States is convinced that such an approach does not satisfactorily address our fundamental concerns and cannot form the basis for negotiations in Geneva. Rather, the United States believes that many outer space challenges facing us today could be addressed through practical, near-term approaches such as non-legally binding transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) and the development of norms or standards of responsible behavior in space. These approaches have the benefits of improving awareness and increasing transparency among States, and encouraging responsible actions in, and the peaceful use of, outer space.

Consistent with this view, we have encouraged the international community to consider the recommendations made by the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities (GGE) in their 2013 consensus report. We have co-sponsored, with Russia and China, Resolutions 68/50, 69/38, and 70/53 that were endorsed by the full UN General Assembly, encouraging Member States to review and implement, to the greatest extent practicable, on a voluntary basis, and through relevant national mechanisms, the proposed TCBMs contained in the GGE report. We have co-sponsored a similar resolution this year.

Resolution 70/53 further requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session a report on the coordination of TCBMs in outer space activities in the UN system, with an annex containing Member States' submissions of views. Over the past two years, the United States has provided its views on how to make practical use of the GGE's recommendations to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (as A/AC.105/1080, dated October 30, 2014) and to the Conference on Disarmament (as CD/2078, dated September 16, 2016), in the context of the ongoing work of these two organizations. We encourage others to provide their views to the Secretary-General in advance of the seventy-second session. In addition, we welcome informal discussions on outer space TCBMs in 2017 within the UN Disarmament Commission, and would also support discussion of this topic at a joint ad hoc meeting of the First and Fourth Committees next year, as proposed by COPUOS. I would note that the United States was pleased to join consensus on the COPUOS report in June, which included agreement on the first set of guidelines on long term sustainability.

Mr. Chairman, the GGE report also established criteria for the development of outer space TCBMs. In applying these criteria, U.S. experts, along with a number of GGE experts from other countries, have noted that some TCBM proposals, such as Russia's initiative for States to make declarations of "No First Placement," or NFP, of weapons in outer space, fail to satisfy the GGE criteria. The NFP initiative's proponents have failed to adequately explain how it would be consistent with these criteria. Furthermore, they also have failed to explain how this initiative would enhance stability in space when it is silent regarding the most pressing threat to outer space systems: terrestrially based anti-satellite weapons.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to conclude by repeating our long-standing position: if we are serious about sustaining the outer space environment for future generations, then we must address the challenges facing us today, by working together to develop and implement pragmatic measures.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.