

**Statement by the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Office
for Outer Space Affairs**

Delivered by Thomas Markram
Director and Deputy to the
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



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Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to address you as commence your deliberations on this new agenda item on outer space. I am pleased to deliver this statement today on behalf of the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Office for Outer Space Affairs.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Jeroen Cooreman on his election as chair of the working group and assure him of the full support of the Secretariat.

The introduction of a new topic to the agenda of the Commission – for the first time since the year 2000 – is an important opportunity for this body.

The situation in outer space has changed substantially in recent decades. The international community is increasingly dependent on space-based platforms for economic development, communications, combating climate change and ensuring global peace and security.

We have seen an enormous increase in outer space activities, driven largely by the private sector but also including a significant increase in the number of military users and actors.

This growing dependence on space-based platforms and the increasing strategic value of outer space has raised the likelihood that a terrestrial conflict could spill over into the already fragile space environment, with potentially devastating consequences.

It was in this context that in 2010 the General Assembly established a group of governmental experts on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space activities. That group produced a consensus report in 2013, which included recommendations on voluntary measures that could build mutual understanding and trust and reduce misperceptions and miscalculations, thereby helping to prevent military confrontation and foster stability.

Since 2013, the General Assembly has encouraged and subsequently called upon all Member States to review and implement the proposals of the group of governmental experts. It referred the report to the attention of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), the Conference on Disarmament and to this body.

For its part, COPUOS in successive years considered the proposed measures with a view to identifying those that could be relevant to concerns within its purview. The Conference on Disarmament has also discussed the recommendations under the item “prevention of an arms race in outer space”, and the CD took a welcome decision this year to establish a subsidiary body on this topic.

Entities within the United Nations system have established coordination mechanisms, including through UN-Space, to assist Member States in the implementation of these measures. At the request of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General issued a report to the current session which described these activities, identified gaps, and recommended ways in which UN entities can further assist in the implementation of TCBMs, if so decided by Member States.

The non-paper by the Secretariat, which was circulated last week as a background document for this working group, gives some examples for where the mandates of UN entities could be strengthened to enable them to better promote the practical implementation of TCBMs in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space.

The first example is in the dissemination of State information on national space policies, military space policies and military space expenditure.

OOSA and ODA both conduct activities that already support such information exchanges or that could be adapted to do so. Since 1962, OOSA has collected and disseminated information on national space policies. Its website also serves as a repository of information on related topics, such as national space debris mitigation standards, national space legislation and relevant international agreements.

While ODA maintains three confidence-building mechanisms for the reporting of information on military capabilities, Member States do not in general provide information on their military policies under those mechanisms.

Since 2015, on an annual basis ODA has requested input from Member States on military space expenditure and other national security space activities for inclusion in the report for the Secretary-General on military expenditures. No Member State has yet provided such information. It thus remains an open question as how to facilitate the implementation of this measure, and we would welcome any guidance from the Commission on this matter.

The second example is in the collection and dissemination of pre-launch notifications.

There is no specific mechanism within the United Nations system for the provision of such information.

States that subscribe to The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation commit to exchanging pre-launch notifications on their launches of ballistic missiles and space-launch vehicle launches.

OOSA currently provides some pre-launch information based on open source data, and could expand this practice if requested by Member States.

The third example relates to the regular dissemination of risk reduction information.

Existing international legal instruments already oblige the Secretary-General to disseminate information comparable to that recommended in the 2013 report of the group of governmental experts. This includes information on controlled and uncontrolled re-entries of high-interest space objects, emergency situations relating to nuclear power sources and intentional orbital breakups.

In line with these precedents, these existing mechanisms could be expanded to provide regular notifications relating to risk reduction in outer space activities through a dedicated web platform. OOSA could also use and expand its existing technical capacity to validate and verify this information, and to follow up with national focal points.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The report of the Secretary-General, as contained in document A/72/65, describes in further detail where entities can already facilitate the implementation of a range of TCBMs within their existing mandates.

I hope my brief presentation today has been useful in bringing into focus some of those areas in which further efforts are needed to promote the practical implementation of TCBMs in outer space activities, with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Office for Outer Space Affairs stand ready to assist your work toward this end.

I wish you a productive and successful session.

Thank you very much.

