



Open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours

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Consideration of issues contained in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/231

Written contribution to the United Nations OEWG on Reducing Space Threats

Submitted by Canadian Pugwash Group

1. The Canadian Pugwash Group (CPG) welcomes this opportunity to provide the OEWG with its views on the subject of outer space security and how “norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours” can play a role in preserving outer space for peaceful purposes in keeping with the *Outer Space Treaty*. Recently, it has become common to describe outer space as an environment that is “congested, competitive and contested” while overlooking the fact that it has also been a realm of remarkable cooperation. Reinforcing outer space’s special status as a “global commons” beyond national appropriation or claims of sovereignty and one in which all activity is to be undertaken “for the benefit and in the interests of all countries” should be a broad goal for the OEWG. At a time of serious geopolitical tensions, it is all the more urgent to ensure that armed conflict is not extended into space and that all space objects can carry out their increasingly important functions on behalf of global society free from man-made threats.

2. Activity in outer space is undergoing a form of democratization with many more actors beyond governments engaging in space operations. Increasingly, the civilian and commercial space industry will be the driving force behind the exploration and exploitation of outer space. At the same time these civilian uses could be imperilled if military space action is not restrained.

3. CPG believes that the views of states and stakeholders already submitted in the lead up to the OEWG’s first substantive session provides an appealing “menu” of possible measures that could eventually serve as products of the OEWG. The recommendations of the 2013 United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on transparency and confidence-building measures are another existing source of ideas. There appears currently to be a large degree of convergence around the utility of certain actions which would make a practical contribution to space security. A ban on the testing of kinetic or destructive anti-satellite weapons (ASATs) and agreement on standards to govern “rendez-vous and proximity operations” (RPO) seem to enjoy significant support. These measures would be beneficial to all space actors and could be candidates for early consideration and eventual elaboration by the OEWG.

4. It is encouraging that a major space power has announced that it will not conduct destructive direct-ascent ASAT missile testing and will seek to establish this practice as a new international norm for responsible state behaviour. This timely unilateral declaration could prompt similar commitments and serve to facilitate the OEWG’s work to codify a ban on destructive ASAT testing.



5. The OEWG could also usefully seek to clarify and develop norms that complement key provisions of the *Outer Space Treaty* relevant to space security. The Article IX restrictions on creating “harmful interference” and associated obligations for consultations with potentially affected parties could be built upon and measures identified that would help ensure better implementation of these treaty provisions.

6. The ICRC has justly raised concerns over the adverse impact of some military actions on the provision of space-enabled services on which the global public depends. CPG is supportive of the suggestions already made by Germany and the Netherlands that satellite generated precision navigation and timing (PNT) signals be safeguarded from jamming or spoofing interference that could disrupt their normal functioning and deny civilian users of their benefits. Satellites and their supportive infrastructure should be viewed as critical infrastructure on which the public depends and should be protected from attack or interference under international law and agreed norms.

7. In a spirit of transparency and partnership, civil society is ready to engage in the OEWG’s efforts to reinforce the existing legal regime for outer space with new norms, rules and principles for responsible behaviour.
