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

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Item 6 (b) of the agenda

Consideration of issues contained in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/231: To consider current and future threats by States to space systems, and actions, activities and omissions that could be considered irresponsible

Space risks and threats

Submitted by the Russian Federation

1. In principle, “space risks and threats” can be divided into two categories: those arising from the peaceful exploration of space (for example, the rapid increase in the number of small satellites and their constellations in Earth orbit, space debris issues, dangerous close approaches, etc.) and those specifically resulting from the militarization of outer space.
2. Consideration of current and future threats by States to space systems, and actions, activities and omissions that could be considered irresponsible in the open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/231 on the First Committee subject, should be tightly linked to the prevention of an arms race in outer space and focus exclusively on military risks and threats.
3. Otherwise, the group’s discussion runs the risk of sidetracking efforts to achieve this key objective, set for the international community in the decisions taken at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978. Moreover, it has the potential to legitimize the claim that outer space has become an arena of rivalry and confrontation between States, thereby justifying the conclusion that combat systems can be deployed in space and that force can be used against or by space objects. Russia is firmly opposed to this orientation of the work of the open-ended working group.
4. With regard to space, according to the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, the intention to place weapons in outer space is the main external military risk, and the disruption of the functioning of systems for the monitoring of outer space is a military threat.
5. Military risk is understood as a state of relations between or within States characterized by a combination of factors that, under certain circumstances, could lead to the emergence of a military threat. Military threat is defined as a state of relations between or within States characterized by a real possibility of military conflict between opposing sides and a high degree of readiness of a given State (or group of States) or separatist (terrorist) organizations to use military force (armed violence). These understandings need to be reinforced within the open-ended working group.
6. Given this assessment of the threats and risks in the context of outer space, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have the following objectives in the interests of national defence and security: providing timely warning of aerospace attacks; ensuring readiness to



repel aerospace attacks; deploying and maintaining an array of spacecraft in orbit in the strategic outer space zone to support the activities of the Russian Armed Forces; and improving the aerospace defence system. The actions of Russia in outer space are non-confrontational in character and are carried out in strict compliance with international law, including the basic 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (Outer Space Treaty).

7. As for the threats and dangers arising from and related to the peaceful development of outer space, they should be addressed primarily in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which has a mandate and is the universal forum for the discussion of the entire range of relevant issues.

8. The international community must pay its utmost attention to the policies being pursued by a number of Member States to place weapons in space, increase force capabilities (both kinetic and non-kinetic) against space objects and use outer space for military purposes. Ambitious programmes are being implemented to develop weapon systems designed for the threat or use of force in, from or against outer space.

9. These actions, aimed at the use of space for military operations (both “defensive” and “offensive”) are motivated by the pursuit of military dominance. They are detrimental to international peace and security and could result in severe instability and an arms race in outer space, which would completely undermine the prospects for arms limitation and reduction in general.

10. If it is not prevented in time, an arms race in outer space will devour huge material resources, undermine the prospects of arms reduction in general and create insurmountable obstacles to international cooperation in the peaceful exploration of outer space and to the use of the results of scientific and technological progress in that area for peaceful purposes.

11. In the context of the work of the open-ended working group, it is essential in particular to reaffirm existing international legal rules and principles governing outer space activities. We renew the call to reaffirm the commitment to the decisions taken at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1978 providing for the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and the launch of relevant negotiations in accordance with the Outer Space Treaty. Without adequate safeguards for keeping outer space free of weapons, enshrined in a legally binding international instrument, it is futile to address issues relating to the peaceful use of outer space and the safety of outer space activities.

12. At the national and international levels, Member States should commit to the complete exclusion of outer space from the arms race and the preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all humankind.

13. Specifically, such an approach entails the following commitments on the part of Member States:

- Not to use space objects as weapons against any targets on Earth, in the air or in outer space
- Not to create, test or deploy weapons in space for any purpose, including for missile defence, as anti-satellite capabilities or for use against targets on Earth or in the air, and to eliminate any such systems already in the possession of States
- Not to create, test, deploy or use space weapons for missile defence, as anti-satellite capabilities or for use against targets on Earth or in the air
- Not to destroy, damage, disrupt or alter the trajectory of the space objects of other States
- Not to assist other States, groups of States or international, intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, including non-governmental entities established, incorporated or located in territory under their jurisdiction and/or control, in engaging in the above-mentioned activities and not to encourage them to do so

14. Work must begin without delay on the elaboration of a legally binding international instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and the preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes that provides for a prohibition on the placement of any type of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force in, from or against outer space. The Russian-Chinese draft treaty on prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against space objects could serve as the basis for such a document.

15. The Russian Federation aims to achieve open-ended working group results that further the goals of preventing an arms race in outer space and elaborating a legally binding multilateral instrument on prevention of an arms race in outer space containing guarantees for the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against or by space objects.
