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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 5 of the agenda

General exchange of views

Submission of China Pursuant to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/36

Submitted by China

I. Introduction

1. Outer space is closely related to the security and welfare of humankind, and has striking features of a community with a shared future for humankind. Space utilization and exploration as well as space technology advancement and its extensive application have brought not only benefits for the development and prosperity of human society but also rising challenges and risks. In particular, the rising risks of the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space have become the greatest threat to outer space security.

2. Preventing an arms race in outer space is the precondition for safeguarding outer space security and ensuring peaceful uses of outer space, as well as one of the most prominent and pressing issues for the international community. Since the existing international legal instruments are insufficient to deal with the new challenges, the conclusion of an arms control treaty on outer space becomes even more important and urgent and should be viewed as the priority and fundamental goal on the related international agenda. The discussions on responsible behaviours in outer space can only serve the fundamental goal of preventing an arms race in outer space. No attempts should be made to dwell on less important issues, mixing up different agendas, or even to use such discussions as a tool for certain countries to shirk their own responsibility and pin the blame on others. All relevant discussions on responsible behaviours in outer space should adhere to multilateralism and avoid being politicized, discriminatory or exclusive.

3. Outer space security concerns the common security of all humankind. Maintaining outer space security should be the responsibility of all countries, and those with the most advanced space capabilities bear a special responsibility in preventing an arms race in outer space and ensuring peaceful uses of outer space. China believes that outer space should be a new frontier for win-win cooperation rather than a new battlefield of great powers competition. In this vein, to safeguard and ensure outer space security, all countries should make efforts in the following five respects:

- First, all countries should be committed to building a community with a shared future for humankind and to maintaining the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable global security. This is the conceptual basis for maintaining outer space security.



- Second, preventing the weaponization of outer space and an arms race in outer space in a practical and effective manner is fundamental for maintaining outer space security. It is imperative to conclude an international legally binding instrument at an early date. The United Nations should re-establish the Group of Governmental Experts or establish an open-ended working group on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, for which responsible behaviours in outer space could be included as one of the agenda items.
- Third, transparency and confidence-building measures could play a certain positive role and serve as a useful supplement to legally binding arms control measures on outer space. However, discussions on transparency and confidence-building measures should not replace the negotiation of an international legally binding instrument.
- Fourth, a proper balance should be struck between outer space security and the peaceful and sustainable uses of outer space. The equal rights of all countries concerning the peaceful uses of outer space should be respected and ensured and related international exchange and cooperation enhanced.
- Fifth, the United Nations should play its role as the central platform for outer space governance in order to ensure extensive participation, fairness and inclusiveness in the related international rule-making process. Different United Nations forums should fully respect each other's mandates while maintaining close coordination and cooperation.

II. Overview of the outer space security situation

4. In general, space security and space safety are two different dimensions of the outer space issue. Space security refers to the risks of the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space, including actions such as declaring outer space as a new war-fighting domain, developing military capabilities in outer space, establishing an independent space force and space command, deploying weapons and equipment expeditiously and conducting military exercises in outer space. Such actions will increase the risks of strategic miscalculation, accidental clashes, or even conflicts, and therefore are the fundamental threats to outer space. Space safety, which refers to the risks occurring in the process of peaceful uses of outer space, including, inter alia, orbit congestion, collision and space debris, is the common challenge all countries face when conducting space activities. Space security and space safety are issues of a different nature, and the approaches to deal with them should vary accordingly. We should avoid mixing them up and confusing the primary with the secondary. If we cannot prevent an arms race in outer space and safeguard peace in outer space, neither security nor safety will be possible.

5. Above all, the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space are becoming more prominent and pressing. The root cause is that a certain country sticks to the Cold War mentality, pursues unilateral military and strategic superiority in space and increases its attempts, plans and actions to seek dominance in space. This is evident in three respects:

- First, outer space has been increasingly regarded as a new battlefield. The United States publicly declares outer space as a new war-fighting domain, establishes an independent Space Force and Space Command, and accelerates the building up of a combat system in outer space, in a bid to get ready for a space war. The United Kingdom just announced the establishment of its new Space Command and a military force with space combat capability, and plans to invest tremendously in research and development on space weapons, including directed-energy weapons. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has for the first time defined space as an operational domain, with a view to enhancing synergistic operational capabilities in space. Such actions have exacerbated the trend of an arms race in outer space, increased the risk of turning outer space into a war-fighting domain like the land, sea and air, and dramatically increased the uncertainty of outer space security.

- Second, the vulnerability of outer space security is rising. The development of anti-satellite weapons, missile defence systems and long-rang precision attack weapons has posed challenges to traditional strategic balance and stability. The United States was the first country to conduct anti-satellite weapon tests, and with the most tests conducted, it has created the largest amount of space debris. In its 2019 Missile Defense Review, the United States stressed the importance of space in missile defence and its plans to build a network of space-based infrared sensors, develop new type of space sensors and deploy space-based missile interceptors in space. In recent years, the United States has been upgrading its space tests, including by repeatedly testing the X-37B spacecraft, extending the lifespan of a communication satellite (Intelsat 901) in the graveyard orbit after docking with MEV-1 and deploying an upgraded Counter Communication System, which could be used to jam signals and disrupt satellite communications. These technologies can be diverted to offensive military use, thus posing a serious threat to the security of the outer space assets of other countries.
- Third, the risk of confrontation and conflict in outer space is rising. In terms of strategy, expressions like competition, adversaries and threat are frequently used in the National Space Strategy of the United States and the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy of the United Kingdom. In terms of actions, the United States has conducted rendezvous proximity operations or flyovers that endanger other countries' satellites in orbit, tested offensive and defensive space capabilities and interfered with the normal space operations of other countries. Such actions have posed severe threats to the space assets of other countries, aggravated tension in space and increased the risk of military miscalculation and conflict.

III. Comments on responsible behaviours in outer space

6. Outer space security is a very complex issue. The binary distinction between responsible and irresponsible behaviours in outer space is over-simplified and subjective and can easily be used as a political tool. In spite of this, China is willing to share its understanding of responsible behaviours in outer space, with a view to promoting mutual understanding, broadening consensus and contributing to the international efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space.

A. Responsible behaviours in outer space should observe the principles set out below

- First, safeguarding common and universal security. All countries should, by building a community with a shared future for humankind and bearing in mind the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable global security, shoulder the responsibility of maintaining outer space security and cope with threats to outer space security through cooperation, with a view to maintaining common and universal security. The major powers should abandon the mindset of unilateralism, the pursuit of absolute superiority, absolute freedom and unilateral security in outer space, the strategy and policy of pursuing dominance in space, and the approaches that stress the security of one single country or a small group of countries by undermining the security interests of other countries or even the common security of the international community. No country should cross the red line of conflict or war in outer space. All parties should enhance understanding and mutual trust through dialogue and avoid confrontation and miscalculation. The countries with the greatest space capabilities bear a special responsibility in this respect.
- Second, respecting and abiding by basic principles set out in existing international law. All countries should ensure that their space behaviours are in

line with international law and the principles governing international relations, which are the basic norms of responsible behaviour. All countries should follow the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, abiding by the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects and the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, and fulfil the obligations of international law in good faith.

- Third, persisting in preventing an arms race in outer space. Preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space is fundamental to safeguarding outer space security. The highest priority is to negotiate and conclude an international legally binding instrument on arms control in outer space at an early date. The United Nations should establish a second group of governmental experts or an open-ended working group on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, for which responsible behaviours in outer space could be included as one of the agenda items. While the Conference on Disarmament is yet to reach an agreement on its programme of work and start negotiations, a technical expert group could be established to discuss technical issues such as the definition, scope and verification of a future legal instrument on outer space arms control. Transparency and confidence-building measures could play a positive role in this regard, but they should not replace the negotiation of a treaty on outer space arms control.
- Fourth, striking a balance between outer space security and the peaceful use of outer space. The equal rights of all countries concerning the peaceful uses of outer space, particularly the interests of developing countries and emerging spacefaring countries, should be respected and ensured and related international exchange and cooperation enhanced. We should promote international exchanges, technical assistance and cooperation, promote universal and shared benefit of outer space technological development, and promote the peaceful use of outer space as a strong driver of economic and social development for all. Ideological bias, double standards and unilateral sanctions should be abandoned, political divides and technical barriers should be removed, and abuses of such pretexts as security threats in order to hamper the peaceful use of outer space should be avoided.
- Fifth, upholding multilateralism and seeking comprehensive and coordinated solutions. We should support the United Nations playing a central role as the main platform for outer space governance, and ensure extensive participation, justice and inclusiveness in related international rule-making, build the widest possible international consensus and avoid imposing the wills of some countries on others. Relevant United Nations agencies have their own mandates and focuses; therefore, in the coordinating and cooperating needed, efforts should be made to avoid excessive overlapping and confusion. The Conference on Disarmament should play a primary role in preventing an arms race in outer space. Other multilateral platforms such as the First Committee and the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Disarmament Commission could facilitate relevant discussions within their mandates.

B. In terms of specific actions, China calls upon all countries to take the actions set out below

- First, supporting the negotiation of a treaty on space arms control. All countries should support prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force anywhere against outer space objects through legally

binding measures. Whether a country has the political will to participate in such a negotiation is the touchstone for its sincerity in terms of behaving responsibly.

- Second, suspending confrontation and interference in outer space. For example, suspending unrestrained research and development on and the deployment of missile defence systems, particularly the deployment of missile interceptors in space; and suspending rendezvous proximity operations and space-based tests of technologies that endanger other countries' spacecrafts.
- Third, taking transparency and confidence-building measures on a voluntary basis. All countries should enhance mutual trust and avoid miscalculation through appropriate and feasible transparency and confidence-building measures, which could be supplementary to the negotiation and conclusion of an international legally binding instrument on space arms control. These measures include but are not limited to: no first placement of weapons in outer space; space security dialogue and exchanges on national space strategies, policies and intentions; cooperation on space debris mitigation, space objects collision avoidance, space launching notification and space facility visits; and seeking to reach bilateral or multilateral arrangements.
- Fourth, ensuring long-term sustainability of the peaceful use of outer space. Necessary technical measures should be taken to mitigate space debris in accordance with relevant international rules. Extensive discussions on the long-term sustainability of the peaceful use of outer space and space debris mitigation within the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space framework should be continued, with wide participation from all relevant parties. Meanwhile, the legitimate rights and special needs of the developing countries should be fully taken into consideration.

IV. China's policies and practices in maintaining outer space security

7. China has consistently advocated the peaceful uses of outer space and firmly opposed the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space as well as the extension of armed conflict to outer space. China maintains that the exploration and use of outer space should serve the purpose of promoting the economic, scientific and cultural development of all countries and benefit all humankind. To this end, China has been making unswerving efforts in the following respects:

- First, China has actively promoted the negotiation of an arms control treaty on outer space. China and Russia jointly submitted to the Conference on Disarmament a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects in 2008 and its updated text in 2014, which provides a good basis for future negotiations. Since 2007, China has sponsored the resolutions entitled "Prevention of an arms race in outer space", "Further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space" and "No first placement of weapons in outer space" in the First Committee of the General Assembly. As proposed by China, Russia and some other countries, the United Nations established the Group of Governmental Experts on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space in 2017, which held two sessions in August 2018 and March 2019, respectively, and open consultations in January 2019. Although the Group failed to adopt a substantive report owing to blocking by the United States, all parties had an unprecedentedly in-depth and substantive discussion on elements of an international legally binding instrument on arms control in outer space, which laid the groundwork for the next step forward in the process of arms control in outer space.
- Second, China has attached great importance to transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space. As one of the sponsors of the resolution

entitled “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities”, China has actively taken part in the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities, made a number of constructive suggestions and supported all parties in actively studying and implementing the report prepared by the Group in 2013 on a voluntary basis. China has released a white paper entitled “China’s space activities” four times, in 2000, 2006, 2011 and 2016, and released a white paper entitled “China’s national defense in the new era” in 2019, which fully demonstrate China’s space policy and space activities plan. China has registered relevant information in strict accordance with the requirements of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space. The Chinese Government issued the Interim Measures on the Administration of Permits for Civil Space Launch Projects to strengthen permit approval of launch projects and the regulation of commercial space activities. China has published significant space launch activities through media or maintained communication and coordination with relevant countries and international organizations.

- Third, China has actively engaged in international cooperation on the peaceful uses of outer space. China has actively participated in the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its working group and has played a constructive role in concluding the preamble and the 21 Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities. China has also actively participated in the cooperation under multilateral forums, including the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, the International Asteroid Warning Network and the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group, and conducted regular exchange with relevant countries on matters such as space debris and satellite collision warning. To integrate international standards, the Chinese Government has issued Space Debris Mitigation Requirements and other standards. China has offered to employ passivation measures regularly on the upper stage of carrier rockets, which has contributed to zero growth in the total number of pieces of space debris created by China. China has also proactively carried out clearance operations for end-of-life spacecraft, in the form of disposal or transfer to a graveyard orbit, so as to preserve orbital resources to the greatest extent possible.
- Fourth, China has actively conducted international space exchanges and cooperation. China has signed more than 130 space cooperation agreements and memorandums of understanding with nearly 40 countries and international organizations, provided satellite service to more than 10 countries and promoted the international application of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System. China has organized and received visits from foreign officials and aerospace experts to its launch centre. China has actively conducted international cooperation within the framework of the United Nations, the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) group. China has published space application cooperation programmes on its space station for all countries, in cooperation with the United Nations. In the first round, nine projects from 17 countries have been selected to participate in the scientific experiments of China’s space station, and a second round of selection will be published in due course.

V. Conclusion

8. A space war cannot be won and must never be fought. The history of the nuclear arms race should never be repeated in space. All nations share broad common interests in outer space. We should preserve space as a new frontier for cooperation rather than as a battlefield for competition and confrontation. China stands ready to make joint efforts with other parties in outer space with a view to building a community with a shared future for humankind, and to actively seek practical and effective solutions to space security threats so as to safeguard

the common security of humankind, in a bid to contribute to the peace, security and sustainability of outer space.

9. China kindly requests the Secretary-General to take account of China's views in his substantive report prepared pursuant to paragraphs 5 and 6 of General Assembly resolution 75/36 and to include this document in his report.
