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Agenda item 5

Preparation of recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities

Working paper submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

1. Space systems are vital for global prosperity, development and security.
2. A number of States possess capabilities that can damage, degrade or destroy space systems. In the context of an intensifying systemic competition between States, there is a risk of miscalculation and misunderstanding leading to unmanaged escalation and inter-State conflict.
3. That is why the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland attaches great importance to the work of the United Nations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and why we introduced a new General Assembly resolution ([76/231](#)) in 2021 on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which established a United Nations open-ended working group to address State threats to space systems through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.
4. At the first session of the open-ended working group, there was overwhelming support among States for implementing and upholding the existing legal and normative framework that applies to space, including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, and a common view that doing so can help us to address some of the threats that we face in space.
5. At the second session, it was clear that there is a diverse range of threats to and from space systems and that these are evolving with the emergence of new technological developments and new space actors. This reinforces the view of the



United Kingdom that it is important to look at the prevention of an arms race in outer space through fresh eyes, taking account of the full set of threats that we face.

6. At the third session, States proposed a number of new norms, rules and principles of responsible space behaviours. One of the main topics that delegations addressed was the deliberate destruction of space objects and the generation of orbital debris. The United Kingdom calls upon States to commit to not conducting destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests, in line with General Assembly resolution 77/41, which was adopted with over 150 votes, signalling widespread support for ending destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing.

7. Norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour can form an important part of our toolkit in implementing the existing legal framework and in addressing outstanding challenges to outer space security, along with transparency, confidence-building measures and legally binding instruments. Effectively implemented norms, rules and principles may develop the ideas and elements and build the trust that can lead to agreement on legally binding instruments in the future.

8. Many space capabilities are dual-use, having both a civilian and military use, such as communications and navigation, on-orbit servicing and active debris removal. This makes it difficult to formulate a viable definition of a weapon in space. Additionally, satellites are situated at large distances from Earth and generally move very quickly, making it challenging to verify what capabilities a satellite possesses.

9. That is why we do not support initiatives such as the proposed treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, on the threat or use of force against space objects and on the resolution on no first placement, calling for all countries to declare that they would not be the first to place weapons in space.

Transparency and confidence-building measures

10. Improving transparency and lines of communication among States is vital for reducing the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation and for creating more favourable conditions for norms of behaviour to be agreed.

11. If States are as transparent as possible about their intentions, capabilities, doctrine and policies, it can all help to improve mutual understanding, build trust and reduce risks of conflict.

12. The United Kingdom supports the recommendations contained in the 2013 report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities (A/68/189). The United Kingdom encourages States to implement them, which can be done unilaterally, bilaterally or multilaterally.

13. In particular, States should publish their military and security space strategies, policies, doctrines and expenditures as part of implementing the recommendations in paragraphs 27 (a), 37 and 38 of the above-mentioned report. Such information could also be hosted on a United Nations web page for an additional level of transparency, for example on the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research Space Security Portal.¹

14. Also, military space operators should establish a consultative mechanism to give effect to the recommendations contained in paragraph 57 of the report. This might allow, for example, States to clarify information regarding the exploration and use of space for national security purposes, to clarify ambiguous situations, or to prevent or minimize potential risks of physical damage or harmful interference.

¹ <https://unidir.org/projects/space-security-portal>.

15. Additionally, States with a space launch capability should provide prelaunch notifications of all launches into space in accordance with The Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation and engage in prelaunch coordination with States that might be affected by re-entering debris (e.g. rocket stages) that pose a potential risk of injury to people and damage or destruction of property.

16. Transparency is also important with respect to civilian space activities. Many civilian space systems can also be used for military purposes. For example, an emerging area of opportunity and challenge is the development of systems for active debris removal and in-orbit servicing and manufacturing.

17. While such technologies offer the prospect of cleaning up the space environment and making space activities more sustainable, they have the potential to be used in either offensive or defensive operations against satellites belonging to other countries. It is therefore important that countries be transparent about the development, deployment and use of such systems. For example, providing advance notification of active debris removal and orbit servicing and manufacturing operations, or the testing of such technologies, will help to build confidence and trust that such systems are to be used for their stated purpose. In these cases, countries should provide information on the nature of the mission and the technologies being used or tested.

18. Comprehensive, consistent and timely registration of all space objects is also important for building trust among nations. The United Kingdom registers its space objects in accordance with the registration convention and keeps a national register containing details on the purpose and function of the objects, as well as their orbital parameters.
