FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE
SIXTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE UNGA

THEMATIC DEBATE ON
OUTER SPACE (DISARMAMENT ASPECTS)

BY

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TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT IN GENEVA

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Mr. Chairman,

The Netherlands would like to commemorate the fact that this year marks the 50th anniversary of space travel, which of course was initiated by the launch of the famous Sputnik. And this year we are also celebrating the 40th anniversary of space law, for it has been forty years since the agreement of the Outer Space Treaty, which has served us well!

Evidently, much has happened since. More and more satellites were launched into outer space, more and more intelligent technology was developed, and more and more nations became active in space. In effect, the world as a whole has become increasingly dependent on space activities, that is, on very vulnerable space objects. With this, the importance of maintaining outer space for peaceful activities has increased substantially.

Mr. Chairman,

Considering all the technical developments that have taken place in the last decennia, it is important to acknowledge that the international instruments available to provide some rules and regulations for outer space activities have not developed at the same pace. There are even considerable shortcomings.

Therefore, the Netherlands welcomes the fact that many Delegations included the need for enhanced international space security in their statements at this year’s session of the First Committee. We wholeheartedly share many of their concerns and would like to underline the need for additional international measures on outer space activities that would strengthen the existing legal framework.

As mentioned in the statement by the European Union Presidency during the general debate, the EU has submitted to the UNSG, as requested, its reaction to Resolution 61/75 entitled “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities”, traditionally submitted by the Russian Federation.
In this reaction, the EU introduces concrete proposals in the interest of maintaining international peace and security, promoting international cooperation and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Among other suggestions, the EU proposes a Comprehensive Code of Conduct on Space Objects and Space Activities, that would contribute to filling the gaps emerging in the existing framework.

Mr. Chairman,

In the view of the Netherlands, certain steps need to be taken before effective international discussions on a new legally binding instrument concerning international space security would be possible. For that reason, the Netherlands wishes to promote the idea of a Code of Conduct, or Rules of the Road, as a steppingstone, focusing on the commitment of states to prevent outer space from becoming an area of conflict. To that end, states would have to commit themselves i.a. to refrain from acts, including tests, which can – directly or indirectly – harm any satellite or other space object.

A politically binding instrument such as a Code of Conduct would generate a certain degree of additional security in space. It could also positively influence the international climate and willingness to discuss – legally binding – international rules regarding outer space activities and security to a later stage. Evidently, the support from all space faring states is needed to bring such an instrument about and to make it effective.

Mr. Chairman,

International space security has become an issue that needs to be dealt with urgently. This sense of urgency is reflected by the international agenda, also considering the comprehensive compromise package for a program of work, which is on the table now at the Conference on Disarmament.
This package allows for substantial discussion on the issue of the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space in 2008. It could become a crucial step forward, whereas progress in the field of space security in past years has been hampered by the absence of international discussions on the subject.

The Netherlands stands ready to contribute to these and other discussions on effective ways forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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