Statement

By

Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam
Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations

Introducing the Resolution

A/C.1/62/L.34
entitled
"Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space"

at the First Committee
62nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

New York
22 October 2007

(please check against delivery)
I have the honour to introduce the Draft Resolution on the Prevention of an arms race in outer space as contained in Document A/C1/62/L.34. For long years it has been a privilege for Sri Lanka, together with Egypt, to submit a Draft Resolution on this important issue to the First Committee for the attention of its members and the international community. In this effort we have been supported by a large number of delegations represented at the First Committee who have joined as co-sponsors, the list of which is too long to read out. It is the firm belief of the co-sponsors that the thrust and the substance of this Resolution represent the general will of the overwhelming majority of the international community.

It has been reiterated many times in this Committee as well as in other fora that outer space is the common heritage of humankind and therefore need to be recognized accordingly. The awe and respect with which outer space and other celestial bodies were treated by human civilizations from very early days and by several succeeding generations has led to a general belief that space was touched by the divine and that its serene atmosphere should be allowed to remain peaceful forever. Therefore, it is our desire that outer space, the next frontier of humankind, should remain peaceful for all time, for the benefit of all living beings on Earth.

With the rapid and unprecedented advancement in technology, outer space is now being used extensively for peaceful purposes. Commercial satellites and space crafts dot this last frontier in large numbers. It is estimated that, by the year 2010 the total number of satellites around the Earth will reach around 2000. Our capacity to exploit space for peaceful purposes is inherently beneficial to human life, and for the further exploration of outer space for productive purposes. Consequently, the wellbeing of humans will be linked closely, more than ever before, with peace and tranquility of outer space.

However, advancement in technology has also led to theories and concepts that also seek to exploit space for military purposes. Ideas such as “control of outer space”, “power projection into and through outer space” are being discussed, and it is no exaggeration to assume that outer space now has the potential to become the fourth battle field for humans in addition to the theatres of land, sea and air.

However, it would be the greatest folly of the human race to allow outer space to become the next arena for an arms race when most people on earth live below the poverty line and are affected by multifaceted conflicts and disasters, both man made and natural. Humankind simply cannot afford an arms competition of this nature at this juncture and allow precious material and energy resources to be squandered for power projection or domination of a new frontier.

Terrorism that is affecting many corners of the world is a good reason for the international community to assess as to how civilian security can be assured worldwide. We are committed individually and collectively to search for solutions to combat the abominable phenomenon of terrorism.

However, it is becoming even more evident that a weapons based approach is not the solution for assurance of human security, in particular to combat terrorism which is probably the most potent threat to human civilization at this juncture. In this context, it is becoming apparent that deployment of exotic weapons or fire power cannot completely ensure the security of civilian lives in our globalizing world. Therefore, taking the arms race into outer space would
not only be counter productive and meaningless, but will not ensure human security on the ground from potent sources like terrorist groups. Instead, the resources that will be expended upon space based weapon systems can be best used in multifaceted and multidimensional tasks that are required to combat terrorism and protect out citizens.

The deployment of any weapon in outer space could result in a series of possible grave fallouts. It is felt by many that the existing sense of strategic balance could come under strain if outer space becomes an arena for new weapons. In addition, the deployment of weapons in outer space could seriously threaten the security of outer space assets and have the potential to bring harm to the Earth’s biosphere and give rise to the issue of “space debris”.

Therefore, time is opportune for the international community to seriously consider taking focused action with a view to preventing outer space from becoming a battle ground for military supremacy rather than an arena for cooperation and stability. It is absolutely clear that taking measures to prevent an arms race in outer space is more effective, less complicated and less expensive than striving to roll back such a race after it has taken off on the ground. There will be a clear peace dividend arising out of making outer space an arena for cooperation than conflict. As a result, the benefits of peaceful activities in space, which are now dominated by a few existing and emerging space-capable States could be made available to more States at a reasonable cost.

In this context, the sponsors of the Draft Resolution wish to introduce this text for consideration and adoption by the First Committee. As the distinguished delegates may observe, the text, as in previous years, recalls and affirms several international agreements on this subject and understandings reached in several fora to take further measures to commence negotiations to prevent an arms race in outer space. The Resolution reiterates the complementary nature of bilateral and multilateral efforts and highlights the importance of greater transparency in sharing information on all bilateral efforts in this field.

The sponsors of the Draft Resolution view that the Conference of Disarmament - the only multilateral disarmament negotiating forum - has the primary role to address this issue and to commence negotiations at an appropriate time on this subject with a view to arriving at a suitable multilateral agreement. It is our expectation that the Conference on Disarmament, sooner than later, will be able to establish an Ad-Hoc Committee on the prevention of an arms race in outer space with an agreed and an appropriate mandate for this purpose.

In this context, it is unfortunate that long held understandings on this issue are now under threat of being rolled back. However, in this context, there have been several suggestions to the Draft Resolution based on national positions and priorities of some States. Taking into account the views of all concerned, and in a spirit of compromise, and recognizing the long held general understanding on this issue, we have accordingly produced a text similar to that of last year with only technical updates. It is the expectation of the sponsors that the text of the Draft Resolution should enjoy the widest support reflecting the collective will of the international community. We therefore, expect that all members of this Committee will be able to support the Draft Resolution as a manifestation of the general desire of humankind to prevent an arms race in outer space, sooner rather than later.