First Committee
17 October 2011

Thematic statement on outer space (disarmament aspects)

Statement by Ms Claire Elias
First Secretary
Australian Mission to the United Nations in New York

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman
The world is increasingly dependent on space for communications, navigation, climate monitoring, electronic commerce, and a myriad of other services now necessary for our daily lives. All Member States in some way are dependent on space-related systems. The use of space is important for the sustainable development of all nations. As the number, national diversity and range of satellite applications grow, so does international concern about space security.

The Australian Government is currently preparing a comprehensive National Space Policy to chart our way forward in this increasingly important domain.

But Australia has a long history of involvement with space, becoming the fourth nation to successfully launch its own satellite from its own territory in 1967. Our geographic position allows Australia to be an important partner for most major space-faring nations. For example, we are working with the United States to improve space situational awareness, thereby contributing to a service which warns other states of threats to their satellites from orbital debris, and thus enabling timely evasive action.

Mr Chairman
Australia strongly supports the development of a rules-based approach to managing the space domain and is committed to contributing to the development of appropriate international norms for behaviour in outer space.
Australia is seriously concerned about the problem of long-lived orbiting space debris. We consider the most pressing task for the international community is to prevent actions which increase the already serious levels of debris threatening the safety of satellites and human space travel. The inappropriate use of weapons to destroy satellites can create enormous volumes of long-lived orbiting space debris. Unless we can find effective means to prevent such actions, we risk losing the benefits of space for all.

Australia welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to establish in 2012 a Group of Government Experts (GGE) on space transparency and confidence-building measures under resolution 65/68. Australia stands ready to actively contribute to the important work of this GGE.

Australia is disappointed that there has been no substantive progress on space security issues in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and believes that there is a need for fresh thinking in the CD on space security aimed at identifying practical and achievable ways forward.

Australia is increasingly active in the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN COPUOS). We welcome the establishment of the Working Group on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space. We are also honoured to serve as a co-chair of the Expert Group on Regulatory Regimes and as a member of the Expert Group on Space Debris and Space Situational Awareness. Complementarity of effort in COPUOS, First Committee and in the CD remains vital.

Australia also welcomes constructive contributions to space security being made outside the UN context, specifically the proposal put forward by the European Union to develop an international Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities. This kind of initiative offers a valuable pathway to developing further international norms on space behaviour.

Mr Chairman

As space-based systems increasingly become critical infrastructure for nations and critical enablers for the international economy and for development, the security of space becomes even more important. Australia is committed to play its part in developing practical and appropriate measures to protect space for all.