Statement by

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on Behalf of the Arab Group

Before
Cluster three of the first committee:
The Debate on Outer Space (Disarmament Aspects)

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Mr. Chairman

Allow me at the outset to confirm the Arab Group's position towards the matter at hand. We firmly believe in the importance of maintaining outer space utilization exclusively for peaceful purposes.

The placement of any weapon in outer space would have serious consequences. It would negatively affect all countries, both those that have and those that do not have the technological capability to launch orbital objects. The pattern of our life today depends on space activities. An estimated 3,000 satellites are operational, providing vital services in an intricate web of information and communications. The possible interruption of such satellite services as a result of weapons in space would cause a major global collapse.

The legal instruments that pursue this objective — the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and the 1979 Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies — have played a positive role in the promotion of the peaceful use of outer space and in the regulation of activities in space. They have also been important in terms of prohibiting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and certain military activities in outer space.

However, there is widespread recognition of the insufficiency of the international legal instruments dealing with the problem of weapons in space. The current legal system is not sufficient to prevent an arms race in outer space. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the reinforcement of this system, strict compliance with existing bilateral and multilateral agreements, and a review of new measures establishing effective and verifiable agreements on its prevention.

In that context, The Arab Group believes that it is in the best interest of the international community to start negotiations on an international legally binding instrument to prevent the placement of any kind of weapon in outer space.
More than 30 years ago, the Conference on Disarmament was called upon by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament to consider the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space.

For that reason, we endorse the establishment of an ad hoc committee in the Conference on Disarmament on this matter, within a balanced and comprehensive program of work, which would avail an opportunity to negotiate a multilateral agreement on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects.

Forward movement in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) requires political will to engage in negotiations and achieve consensus. Although some member states affirm that the CD is a dysfunctional institution owing to its rule of consensus, surprisingly concerning other issues, such as the prevention of an arms race in outer space, the use of consensus is deemed perfectly legitimate.

Mr. Chairman

In line with the afore-mentioned position of the Arab Group, allow me to deliver some remarks in my national capacity.

Egypt has traditionally presented, along with Sri Lanka, the draft resolution entitled “Prevention of an arms race in outer space” and has regularly voted in favour of the resolution entitled “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities”, submitted by the Russian Federation.

The draft resolution on preventing an arms race in outer space in the document number (A/C.1/67/L.3), which Egypt is introducing this year, is similar in substance to General Assembly resolution 66/27, which was submitted by Sri Lanka and adopted last year under the same agenda item. This year’s draft resolution contains the necessary technical updates. A significant number of States have sponsored the draft resolution so far, and it remains open for further sponsorship. We encourage delegations to co-sponsor the draft resolution in view of what
it represents for achieving progress in preventing an arms race in outer space.

Since it is in the interest of all humankind that outer space continue to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, the draft resolution addresses an issue of particular importance. It emphasizes the need for strict compliance with existing agreements, including bilateral agreements, related to outer space and with the legal regime concerning the use of outer space. It reaffirms that further measures should be examined in the search for effective and verifiable bilateral and multilateral agreements in order to prevent an arms race in outer space, including the weaponization of outer space.

Through the draft resolution, the Conference on Disarmament, as the sole multilateral forum with the primary mandate of negotiating multilateral agreements, is once again invited, in the context of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work, to establish a working group on the issue as early as possible during its 2013 session. That would permit the close examination, through negotiations, of a number of important initiatives that have been put forward within the framework of the Conference, including the Russian-Chinese 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.

We look forward to seeing the draft resolution enjoy the widest possible support this year and call on the two States that abstained in the voting on the resolution last year to reconsider their positions and to join the overwhelming majority of Member States in supporting this year’s draft resolution, given the importance of this issue to the peace and security of humankind.