Statement by the Brazilian Delegation on the thematic debate on outer space (disarmament aspects)

First Committee of the 68th General Assembly

New York, 25 October 2013

(Check against delivery)
Mr. Chairman,

Brazil expresses its continuing concern with the possibility of an arms race taking place in outer space and believes it is in the best interest of the international community to start negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prevent the placement of any kind of weapon in that environment.

While the Outer Space Treaty (1967) prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in outer space, the Treaty alone is not sufficient to fully regulate this issue, since it does not explicitly cover conventional weapons nor new technological advances.

The world we live in strongly depends on space-based resources, providing services that are present in almost every sector of States' and peoples' daily activities. The interruption of these satellite services, as a result of the use of weapons in space, would cause a major global collapse.

More than 30 years ago, the CD was called upon by the SSOD-1 to consider the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. Despite concrete exchanges between 1985 and 1994, it is regrettable that lack of consensus has precluded, since then, the adequate consideration of this fundamental issue by the Conference.

We note however that this impasse has not prevented delegations from putting proposals on the table. Brazil believes that the proposal of a draft "Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects" (the so-called PPWT), tabled in 2008 by Russia and China as a CD working document, is a good contribution for discussions on a legally binding instrument to regulate the matter.

Pending the adoption of a clear prohibition on the placement of weapons in outer space, Brazil believes that it is of foremost importance to preserve the principle of outer space being used and explored exclusively for peaceful purposes.

As anticipated by the Russian delegation and by my own delegation in this First Committee General Debate, it is our intention to jointly present a draft resolution on the "no first placement of weapons in outer space" in the 69th UNGA, which we hope will command the widest possible support among Member States. We welcome the fact that the initiative has already other important co-sponsors on board, such as Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and we hope others will join us as a demonstration of their shared commitment to an outer space free of all weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

Brazil recognizes that transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) can foster mutual understanding, political dialogue and cooperation among States. Yet we also note that they cannot be a substitute for legally binding norms.

Brazil took part, with satisfaction, in the Group of Governmental Experts established in accordance with UNGA Resolution 65/68. We welcome the final report, adopted by consensus. We highlight, in particular, two elements contained in the document for their relevance.
First, the Group concluded that voluntary political measures can form the basis for consideration of concepts and proposals for legally binding obligations. This is a major element to be stressed since the GGE agreed to recognize that TCBMs, for the purpose of the study, were to be considered as non-legally-binding voluntary measures.

Second, the Group agreed on a substantive section of the report devoted to the issue of international cooperation. In that context, experts recognized that international cooperation on scientific and technical projects between both spacefaring and non-spacefaring nations can contribute to confidence building in outer space. Among its recommendations, the Group suggested that bilateral, regional and multilateral capacity-building programmes on space science and technology can contribute to developing the space skills and knowledge of educators and scientists in developing countries throughout the world. The Group also recognized the importance of the adoption of open satellite data collection and dissemination policies for sustainable and economic development and noted that the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, held in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, recognized the importance that space science and technology play in promoting sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

Brazil has also been taking part in the discussions on a possible International Code of Conduct on Outer Space Activities, sponsored by the European Union. While we recognize the efforts conducted by the EU, we continue to believe that this initiative would benefit from an effective multilateral approach and mandate. In Brazil's view, no voluntary measure can entirely reflect the complexities of space security, which would be better addressed in the framework of a legally-binding instrument. Since we believe that a possible Code should aim at addressing exclusively those questions related to the peaceful use of outer space, we note with concern that the newest draft continues to present a reference to self-defense which, in our view, introduces serious difficulties. In our view, such reference could be interpreted in a way that justifies the use of force in outer space. This is a scenario we cannot afford to contemplate, not even in theory.

Mr. Chairman,

As mentioned by the Brazilian delegation in our statement in the General Debate, while we welcome political commitments and voluntary arrangements, we understand that they cannot be a substitute for legally binding measures imposing firm and long-term obligations on States. Brazil hopes that the Conference on Disarmament adopts a Program of Work, with the inclusion of a Working Group on PAROS, that paves the way for the negotiation of a legally-binding instrument preventing the placement of weapons in outer space.

Brazil believes that few issues are as ripe and calling for immediate action as this one.

Thank you.