Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We will soon observe the 50th anniversary of General Assembly’s adoption of the “Declaration of Legal Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Uses of Outer Space.” Resolution 1962 (XVIII), which was adopted by consensus on December 13, 1963, laid out the key principle that outer space is free for exploration and use by all States on a basis of equality and in accordance with international law. Just over three years later, these and other elements of the Principles Declaration formed the core for the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which remains the foundation of the international legal framework for space activities.

In the half century since the Principles Declaration was adopted, all nations and peoples have seen a radical transformation in the way we live our daily lives, in many ways due to our use of space. Over the past three decades, the space environment, especially key Earth orbits, has become increasingly utilized as more and more States are becoming space-faring and space-benefiting nations. As a consequence, the outer space environment is becoming increasingly congested, contested, and competitive – with threats to vital space services potentially increasing during the next decade as disruptive and destructive counterspace capabilities are developed.

In the face of these challenges, it is essential that all nations work together to adopt approaches for responsible activity in space to preserve the freedom of all nations to explore and use outer space for the benefit of present and future generations.

Mr. Chairman,

Given the importance of international cooperation, the United States welcomes the achievement of consensus of the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures.
(TCBMs) in Outer Space Activities. Under the able chairmanship of Victor Vasiliev of Russia, the GGE study provides this body with a unique opportunity to advance consensus on the importance and priority of voluntary and pragmatic measures to ensure the sustainability and safety of the space environment as well as to strengthen stability and security in space for all nations.

The GGE study recommended that States and international organizations consider and implement a range of measures to enhance the transparency of outer space activities, further international cooperation, consultations, and outreach, and promote coordination to enhance safety and predictability in the uses of outer space. Reflecting the extensive technical expertise within the Group, the study provides an analytically rigorous set of criteria for evaluating proposed TCBMs. These criteria can help inform future discussions in this Committee and in other fora regarding the implementation, demonstration, and validation of specific measures.

The Group also endorsed efforts to pursue political commitments — including a multilateral code of conduct — to encourage responsible actions in, and the peaceful use of, outer space. In particular, the Group noted the efforts of the European Union (EU) to develop an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities through open-ended consultations with the international community. In this regard, the United States continues to participate actively in this initiative and looks forward to the next round of Open-ended Consultations to take place in November, 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand. The United States joins the EU in calling on all interested States to continue to engage in this process.

Mr. Chairman,

The GGE study’s findings and recommendations deserve careful consideration by all States. Many of the Group’s recommendations can serve as the basis for a range of political commitments as well as specific TCBMs that can be implemented on a voluntary basis through national mechanisms. Therefore, the United States looks forward to reviewing the status of States’ efforts to implement these specific GGE recommendations at future sessions of this Committee.

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Although specific actions by each State serve as the foundation for the pursuit of unilateral TCBMs, the Group’s study also highlighted the importance of international cooperation at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral level.

As the GGE study noted, international space cooperation should be based upon the 1996 Benefits Declaration endorsed in UN General Assembly Resolution 51/122, with each State free to determine the nature of its participation on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis with regard to appropriate technology safeguard arrangements, multilateral commitments, and relevant standards and practices.

Bilateral TCBMs also include discussions on space security policy, such as those that the United States has been conducting with a number of space-faring nations around the globe. Along with U.S. efforts to develop mechanisms for improved warning of potential hazards to spaceflight safety, these discussions constitute significant measures to clarify intent and build confidence.

Mr. Chairman,

The United Nations itself can play an important role in fostering cooperation on space TCBMs among States. The United States looks forward to discussions next year in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the Disarmament Commission, and the Conference on Disarmament on how the specific recommendations of the GGE study can be considered by each of these bodies within the scope of their respective mandates and programs of work. The United States also looks forward to similar consideration on the relevant aspects of the Group’s recommendations in other UN bodies as well as in regional and multilateral fora.

As the international community moves forward on space TCBMs, there also will need to be greater coordination among relevant UN entities to facilitate the implementation of the transparency and confidence-building measures and promote their further development. In this regard, the United States believes that all relevant entities and organizations of the United Nations system should coordinate, as appropriate, on matters related to the recommendations contained within the Secretary General’s report on the GGE study.
Mr. Chairman,

The GGE study’s endorsement of voluntary, non-legally binding transparency and confidence-building measures to strengthen stability in space is a landmark development. The United States will continue to take a leadership role in international efforts which translate results from this consensus study into action. We are therefore pleased to join in co-sponsorship of a resolution on “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities” at this session of the General Assembly. We hope this resolution can be adopted by consensus.

All nations are increasingly reliant on space, not only when disasters strike, but also for our day-to-day life. We need to protect and preserve our long-term interests by considering the risks that could harm the space environment and disrupt services on which the international community depends. For this reason, we must all work together and take action now to establish measures that will strengthen transparency and stability in outer space. This work toward TCBMs will enhance the long-term sustainability, stability, safety, and security of the space environment. It is in the vital interests of the entire global community to protect the space environment for future generations.

Thank you for your attention.