Chair,

Today is an auspicious day to address this Committee on the security of outer space. On this very date, October 10th, the Outer Space Treaty—the bedrock of international space law—entered into force exactly 50 years ago. Outer space now provides vast social, scientific and economic benefits to humanity. But the sustainability of this critical domain also faces critical challenges.

The diverse nature of space activity requires attention on numerous fronts, and at the highest levels. As we are addressing the UNGA First Committee on Disarmament and International Security, we wish to draw attention specifically to the urgent need to engage in policy discussions and legal instruments related to space arms control.

No clear norms are in place today to prevent an arms race in outer space. At the same time, ground-based anti-satellite weapons (ASATs) have been tested, communications satellites are deliberately and routinely jammed; missile defense systems have been used as ASATs; and precursor technologies that would allow space-to-space offensive capabilities continue to be developed.

The United Nations General Assembly has voted for several years on a resolution on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), which notably states that:

- The “prevention of an arms race in outer space would avert a grave danger for international peace and security”; and that,
- The legal regime applicable to outer space does not in and of itself guarantee the prevention of an arms race in outer space

Despite wide international backing, the annual PAROS resolution has not once been supported by the most advanced spacefaring nation in history. The Conference on Disarmament, which has the primary responsibility for PAROS, has been unable to conduct any substantive negotiations for more than two decades. And any attempts to discuss arms controls at the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) are dismissed as falling outside its jurisdiction.

In the end, efforts to address the prevention of an arms race in outer space head-on do not seem to be a top policy priority for the international community.

During our statement before this Committee last year, we put forward various recommendations concerning the space domain. They all still hold true, but let us highlight again two of the utmost importance:
1. States should pledge not to use any space- or ground-based capabilities to deliberately damage or destroy space assets.
2. States should indicate support for the negotiation of a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space and for interim transparency and confidence-building measures toward that end.

Chair,

Multilateral arms control efforts have typically occurred only after certain categories of weapons have already been used in conflict. With PAROS, however, the international community has the unique possibility to act proactively before outer space becomes weaponized—and the social and economic benefits derived from it are put in jeopardy.

On this golden anniversary of the outer space treaty, we urge all states to act decisively to prevent an arms race in outer space.

* Drafted by Cesar Jaramillo, Project Ploughshares.