United Nations General Assembly
First Committee
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Outer Space

Statement by Mr Darren Hansen, First Secretary, Australian Mission to the United Nations
Check against delivery

Chair

Like many other Member States, Australia is highly reliant on space-enabled services in order to deliver a range of economic and social benefits. We have a correspondingly strong interest in the security and sustainability of outer space. In order to better coordinate our growing interests in this field, the Australian Government recently announced its intention to establish a national space agency.

As the number of States with an interest in outer space grows, we need to consider the best means of ensuring we have the right rules of the road. Part of that consideration should include an examination of the existing legal framework for outer space and how to plug its substantial gaps. For
instance, there are currently no bans on the deployment of conventional weapons in outer space, or on ground-based anti-satellite weapons, high-energy lasers or activities that directly or indirectly create space debris.

In addressing these and other issues, the question is whether legally binding agreements or the approach Australia, and others favour, of developing non-binding, norm-building transparency and confidence building measures, offer the best way to enhance space security.

Australia is one of only sixteen countries that is a State Party to all five space treaties and we remain open to considering the negotiation of further practical space treaties down the track.

However, Australia has concerns about the draft *Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space* and the *No First Placement* initiative.

These proposed initiatives focus on preventing the placement of weapons in orbit but are silent on the threat to space assets posed by ground-based anti-satellite weapons and high-energy lasers.

Both initiatives also fail to adequately define a space weapon, which given the high degree of dual-use space technology may not be possible. Confusion over definitional issues could lead countries to mistakenly assess that another country has placed weapons in space.

Both initiatives are also unverifiable in our view, and therefore do not effectively advance transparency and confidence measures for outer space.
Verifiable non-binding TCBMs offer the best chance of an immediate improvement in the security and sustainability of outer space and the best chance of gaining widespread acceptance.

TCBMs do not limit any State’s use of outer space for peaceful purposes as codified in the Outer Space Treaty. Nor do they do impose requirements that might act as a barrier to space activities of developing countries. On the contrary, transparency and information sharing help the preservation of the space environment in the interest of all countries.

Australia was pleased to join consensus on the COPUOS report in June, which included agreement on the first 12 of Guidelines on the Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space. We consider these to be useful and practical TCBMs.

Australia also submitted a report to the 60th Session of COPOUS on the steps we have taken to implement the categories of TCBMs identified in the 2013 UNGGE report.

We were pleased to support the proposal submitted by China, the Russian Federation and the United States for outer space TCBMs to be included in the agenda of the UN Disarmament Commission at its next session. As the deliberative body of the UN disarmament machinery it is entirely appropriate that the UNDC examine this important issue and develop a practical set of TCBMs or recommendations that can be agreed by all Member States. The product of the UNDC’s work could then be taken up by the Conference on Disarmament if appropriate.
Chair

Australia looks forward to working with all relevant stakeholders in developing a peaceful pathway for all to benefit from the tremendous opportunities offered by space enabled services today and into the future.