Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Statement to the Informal CD Civil Society Forum on Outer Space.
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Thank you to Mr. Michael Møller, UNODA and UNIDIR for this imitative.

The overwhelming majority of United Nations member states are concerned that the weaponisation of outer space will lead to an arms race. They insist that a multilateral treaty is the only way to prevent such an arms race. Each year in the General Assembly, member states adopt a resolution on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS). But some countries continue to research, design, test, and deploy “missile defense” systems and anti-satellite technologies. Some countries have conducted anti-satellite weapon tests. The development of these technologies will instigate a new arms race and increase geopolitical tensions and international insecurity.

With our growing understanding about the universe, it is more important than ever to protect space against weaponisation, militarisation, and irresponsible behavior. A conflict in space would lead to devastating direct consequences for all our daily life on earth, but also affect the overall long-term sustainability and peaceful use of space.

Millions of individuals rely on space on a daily basis for functions such as weather forecasting, navigation, communications, and search-and-rescue operations. Space security is about socio-economic concerns, humanitarian implications and about providing essential services to people.

Unfortunately, the international policymaking community has been unable to develop any global tools that will help address the concerns stemming from increasing outer space activities, let alone the development of space weapon technologies.

Traditional multilateral forums including the CD have failed to achieve any tangible results, largely because international discussions tend to apply the consensus rule, or the idea that all governments need to be fully onboard before agreements can be made.

Previous processes on international issues show that focusing on the consequences that people face on the ground, rather than national strategic and security concerns is a successful way to initiate progress. As a part of such new focus, it is not only important but actual essential to engage a broader spectrum of stakeholders.

The EU International Code of Conduct process has shown that there exist certain tensions between states with more advanced space programmes and emerging space actors. Therefore it is essential that all states, those with advanced space capacity, those that are emerging space powers and those that could be future users of space technology all have a voice at the table. This is currently not provided in the CD.

However, such new stakeholders do not only consist of a new group of states, but also includes other stakeholders, such as international organizations, civil society, and corporations. Together, they broaden the community of actors that have a direct interest in maintaining space
for peaceful uses and provide more incentives for taking action now. This is neither provided in the CD.

It is key that international organizations play a role. UN agencies like ITU, WMO, WHO, and all the humanitarian organizations use space daily for their missions. Including these actors in a discussion will allow for a more comprehensive view of what priorities the international community needs to address. These actors will also make us understand how to deal with space security, as a part of the overall picture of the global security environment and not isolate it.

Finally but definitely not least, the lack of civil society participation in the CD is one of the problems of the CD. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are, today, essential parts of successful multilateral processes. Civil society plays a crucial part in making governments pay attention to specific issues and place it higher on the political agenda. Without civil society pressure, there are very few immediate consequences for governments failing to act. Preventing civil society participation in the CD is directly saying we do not want process here.

An engaged and active civil society will demand results from governments, effectively raising the stakes of negotiations and creating more incentives for decision-makers to achieve agreements.

Space is a global common and is therefore not only a concern for government officials but for the wider public. Civil society participation is therefore a crucial part of ensuring that this issue gets the attention it deserves.

In order for certain items to be prioritized, there needs to be interest and pressure for action from the public. The lack of civil society input on this issue in general and in the CD in particular has also meant a stagnation of public awareness or engagement.

As a result of working to develop a public interest in issues, NGOs have an established track record of advancing political efforts – for example, the work carried out by NGOs on issues such as landmines, cluster munitions and most recently, the Arms Trade Treaty, shows how powerful the engagement of civil society can be.

These processes were very successful and pushed governments beyond discussion to taking effective action and concluded agreements and even treaties far beyond governments initial expectations.

Arms control measures such as a treaty preventing the weaponisation of outer space will not limit any state’s right to use outer space for peaceful purposes but rather will ensure that such use is possible.

WILPF therefore calls on all states to start cooperate and open up the discussion to a more diverse set of actors in order to start negotiate new and stronger terms to keep space for peace.

WILPF is the oldest women’s peace organisation in the world and Reaching Critical Will, is its disarmament programme.

www.reachingcriticalwill.org
www.wilpfinternational.org