Mr. President,
Let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the conference on Disarmament and assure you of my delegation’s full cooperation. We have full confidence in your ability not only to usher us through the scheduled discussions, but also in your efforts through your consultations to reach a comprehensive and balanced program of work that can enjoy the consensus of the Conference.

Mr. President,
Space applications are essential to our modern life-style. Indeed, our reliance on space has reached a level that if anything would impair our access to outer space simple tasks would be difficult to achieve and comforts that we take for granted would be denied us. This simple fact cannot have but one simple and true conclusion; we must avoid turning outer space to yet another field of conflict. But given the history of warfare and conflict, it is self evident that the only way to keep outer space as a peaceful zone is to guarantee that no weapons are ever deployed there. This is the simple, yet crucial, logic of the need to prevent the arms race in outer space, because we have seen over and over again that it is much easier to prevent something from happening than waiting until it occurs and try to roll it back.

Mr. President,
Our position on PAROS is of no surprise. We have repeatedly outlined it in numerous statements in the CD, in the General Assembly and in other fora. Thus, I will only make the following short observations.
First: The cornerstone of dealing with outer space is to recognize it as the common heritage of humankind. We all benefit from it and it is our collective common good. No one country can make claim to outer space nor should it try to monopolize it. It is also not acceptable for any established space-user to try to circumvent the full access and utilization of other countries to outer space. Alternately, any threat to the peaceful utilization of outer space is a threat to the whole community, and thus the responsibility of keeping a peaceful outer space accessible to all humanity is a shared responsibility that requires a multilateral framework.

Second: In stressing the multilateral nature of the issue is not to dismiss unilateral declarations, bilateral agreements and/or like minded group's common positions. However, the latter can only contribute in building confidence and does not nullify nor contradict the need for a multilateral legally-binding agreement on the prevention of arms race in outer space. Such agreements must be concluded with the participation and taking into consideration the interest of all countries with equal privileges and obligations and not be tailor-made for current users of space.

Third: It is clear that the current legal body governing PAROS is lacking. This gap cannot be filled only through TCBMs, as important as they are and I take this opportunity to recognize the work of the Group on Government Experts in this field. Instead, TCBMs are to complement legally binding multilateral treaties that must prohibit not only the placement of any kind of weapon in outer space or celestial bodies, but also prohibit any earth or space based weapons that targets satellites (ASATs).

Fourth: It is easy to say that we cannot deal with PAROS because there are already existing and “legitimate” military applications in outer space – for example military applications including for communication and navigation– but that would be disingenuous; a mere smoking mirrors. Weaponization of outer space is not the same as militarization of outer space. The real challenge to outer space and our common utilization of
it would stem from placing weapons in outer space and targeting satellites, thus indiscriminately affecting the mere possibility of the utilization of outer space for peaceful uses by anyone.

Finally: Any treaty on PAROS must be universal, verifiable, equitable and have the same obligations and benefits for all member states. And on the issue of verification, let me quickly point out to the many studies and proposals related to PAROS have shown that a verification regime CAN be constructed, of course if there is a political will.

Mr. President,
We continue to hold that the CD is the place to negotiate such a treaty, and we are willing to start negotiations now. We recognize the initiative presented by China and the Russian delegation on submitting a document on elements of a treaty, the so called PPWT, which although not perfect can serve as a good base to commence negotiations and build on it. What is important is to start negotiations on this timely issue, and before it becomes too late.

Mr. President,
Every year, Egypt and Sri Lanka alternate on presenting a resolution on PAROS to the first Committee of the United Nations. Every year such a resolution receives near unanimity, with only two countries abstaining, and we call on all countries to continue their support and on those two countries that abstain to join the world community in voting for this resolution. If one is seeking a test of ripeness for negotiations among the four core issues in the CD, this indeed may be a good indicator. We look forward to the commencement of negotiations in the CD on a legally binding verifiable treaty on PAROS.

Thank you Mr. President.