

Statement by Amb.Li Song
at the UNIDIR Outer Space Security Conference
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At the outset, I would like to congratulate on the convene of this conference, extend appreciation to the hosts and other sponsors, and welcome to all the participants. It's the first time for me, in the capacity of China's Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs, to attend this conference. I am very much pleased to talk with all of you on the very important topic of space security.

Colleagues,

The consideration of PAROS at the CD dates back to the 1980's. However, the notion of preventing space from turning into a conflict domain came into being far earlier than that. In 1958, the second year after the first satellite launched into space, the UNGA resolution expressed the wish, as I quote, "to avoid the extension of present national rivalries into this new field". This manifests that, the aspiration of preventing the space from turning into a new battlefield came into being since the very beginning of the space era.

During the last three decades, the CD has carried out a lot of work on PAROS. In 2008, China and Russia, taking into consideration of the previous discussions, submitted the draft PPWT to the CD, and updated it in 2014, which has enjoyed overwhelming support from the international community. Regrettably, due to the objection of certain countries, the CD has been unable to carry out substantive work on the draft for years.

Considering the importance and urgency of the issue, in 2017, China and Russia suggested on the establishment of the UN GGE to make recommendations on substantial elements of the international legally binding instrument. With tremendous efforts, the experts produced a well balanced and objective draft report, which could have served as the basis for consensus. However, due to the blocking by one country, the GGE failed to adopt any substantial report. Ambassador Patriota, as the chair,

will brief us on the topic. Here, I would like to express my appreciation to his professionalism and excellent work. Though the outcome is not satisfying, the process itself matters a lot. That has been the the most profound and substantive discussions on space arms control in decades, and has laid important foundations for our future work on the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on PAROS.

Colleagues,

The current global strategic security landscape is undergoing unprecedented and profound changes. Outer space is turning into a new domain of strategic security. In further promoting CD's work on PAROS, we need to clarify several fundamental questions.

Firstly, is outer space facing the risk of arms race and weaponization?

Some hold the view that there is no arms race or weaponization in outer space. Let's take a look at the reality. In the recent years, driven by the strategy of seeking dominance in space, a superpower has explicitly defined space as a war-fighting domain, speeding up its military build-up, seeking to forge military alliance, and planning to introduce missile defense systems into space. Some other countries are following the suit and promoting their military space capability. An arms race in and weaponization of outer space is not crying wolf, but already an imminent threat. Witnessing all these developments, if we still insist there is no threat, we are either selectively blind or lacking political will. Therefore, we have to feel the urgency of space arms control, and avoid going through the old path of nuclear weapons, which is develop first and disarmament later.

Secondly, are the existing international legal instruments adequate to prevent an arms race in outer space?

This question has been fully discussed during the recent GGE. While some have different views, most of the countries acknowledge that, although the existing legal instruments have played an important role in ensuring the peaceful nature of space, they are unable to keep weapons other than WMD out of space, nor could prevent threat or use of force against space objects. Objectively speaking, it has been 40 years since the latest legal instrument on space was adopted, and there is no international space arms control instrument so far. Given the growing strategic importance, rapid advancement of technologies and the increasing threat

of weaponization, we are severely lagging behind. We need to make joint efforts to fill the loophole in the existing international legal system.

Thirdly, could TCBMs replace the negotiation of a legally binding instrument?

The current discussions on space governance seems to be evolving into a debate over legally binding instrument vs TCBMs. China is a strong advocate for the negotiation of legal instrument, but we are not against transparency measures. We see these two approaches as complementary with each other. As a matter of fact, China has been an advocate and facilitator for the relevant UN process. What we are against is denying the necessity, even the feasibility of the legally binding instrument, and asserting that TCBMs are the only feasible way to maintain space security. There is an ancient Chinese saying, that says “Law is the very foundation of governance.” Without the legally binding instrument as the basis, TCBMs alone, being voluntary and flexible in nature, will not be enough to maintain space security. It has been proved by history, that no arms control or disarmament could be achieved only through transparency measures.

Colleagues,

Outer space is closely related to nuclear and missile capabilities. It is a key component of global strategic balance and stability. PAROS, as one of the core issues of the CD together with the other three nuclear issues, should be attached with equal importance. The CD should shoulder its due responsibility and further promote the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space. In this regard, I would like to offer some preliminary thoughts.

Firstly, the CD should be more clear about its task of negotiating a space arms control instrument. Since 1980s, the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions each year, reiterating CD’s primary role in the negotiation of a multilateral agreement on PAROS. From the open-ended informal meeting of the GGE this year, we could see this remains the common aspiration of the international community. The CD should respond to the call of international community, and make every effort to start the negotiation as early as possible.

Secondly, before arriving at a balanced and comprehensive programme of work to start negotiation, the CD may hold technical

discussions on the key elements of the legal instrument. During the GGE sessions, a series of technical issues have been raised, such as space to space, space to ground, ground to space attack technologies, on-orbit service and dual use technologies. The CD could carry on the work of the GGE, and organize technical discussions on the scope, obligations, verification, definition and TCBMs of the legally binding instrument, to prepare for future negotiation.

Thirdly, the CD should strength linkages with other UN fora working on space security. With the development of space application, the boundary between security and safety in space is blurring. In recent years, the UNDC, UNCOPOUS, UNGA First and Fourth Committee have carried out a lot of work in this regard. The CD should open up, and establish contacts with these UN bodies, as well as academia and industries, by inviting them to speak in the conference regularly, so as to broaden horizon, add new perspectives and inject vitality to its work.

Colleagues,

Last year, the CD has established subsidiary bodies, to have in depth discussions on all its core issues and successfully adopt reports. This has been valuable as it is not only an innovation on CD's working method, but also helps to promote the substantive dialogue. Although we could not arrive at a decision to establish subsidiary bodies this year, it should not hold us back from carrying out substantive discussions. It is my hope that the rotating presidency could make the best use of the time left, carry on what has already been achieved in space arms control, and make refresh contributions to the maintenance of peace and security of outer space.

Thank you!