

(Mr. Van Schaik, Netherlands)

Mr. President, allow me also to make some observations with regard to the highly important question of preventing an arms race in outer space. This subject could well dominate the debate on our security in the next few decades.

It is therefore proper, indeed imperative, that the international community should give increasing attention to current developments which might not only add a new and costly dimension to the arms race but, even more important, could in addition have far-reaching implications for global stability.

The major space Powers bear a special responsibility and we welcome their recent efforts to reach agreement on a suitable basis for bilateral talks on this subject. Yet, my delegation holds the view that the Conference on Disarmament is the appropriate forum where the international community should discuss this vital question. For this reason we deplore the fact that it has not yet been possible to reach agreement on the text of a mandate of an ad hoc committee on outer space.

A good starting-point for a structured discussion in the Committee would in our view be an analysis of existing international law in order to ascertain to what extent international law already restricts the military use of outer space.

Such an approach allows us, against the background of the ongoing development of military space technologies, to identify loopholes or deficiencies in the existing legal system with respect to outer space. In this connection I wish to recall the statement made by Ambassador Ekéus on 22 March 1984, which rightly draws our attention to a series of questions concerning the interpretation and application of existing agreements. Such an analysis would also be useful for the evaluation of various proposals tabled on the subject.

Although this approach would contribute greatly to a better and clearer understanding of the complex questions, we should not, of course, restrict ourselves to the legal aspects of the issue alone. The clear objective of our discussions remains the adoption of concrete measures to prevent an arms race in outer space.

As part of the consideration of such concrete measures, the Conference on Disarmament should on a priority basis focus attention on the issues raised