(Mr. Meiszter, Hungary)

occasionally human lives may have to be the price. Nevertheless, that news deeply disturbed us. We have not the slightest intention to exploit that sad event in a speculative manner, but we simply cannot help reflecting upon it and drawing certain conclusions.

The space shuttle has come to exemplify technology at its most ingenious. It represents the most advanced technology available. It incorporates the work of millions of the most highly skilled people in the United States and elsewhere, who contributed to its design, construction and operation. The optimal time of its launching was carefully calculated several months in advance, and its launching was personally attended by the top echelon in United States space research and application. Yet, in spite of all those genuinely impressive credentials, the tragic incident did occur.

Let us now try to stretch our imagination, and envision the realization of the dream called the Strategic Defence Initiative, which calls for not one but hundreds and hundreds of similar and even more complex systems working in full co-ordination and without a single failure at any moment and under any circumstances. Let us imagine such a system where the launching of the countless number of its components might take place not at the optimally calculated time and not under the personal supervision of legions of scientists and engineers. Who could foretell now how many components of that system would repeat the path and fate of the space shuttle Challenger? The same fate, but with the major difference that they would fall not in the ocean but most probably on populated territories, and not necessarily on the target territory. And besides, those falling objects would not be space cabins with innocent people inside.

In science and technology unexpected results, radical progress and unforeseen novelties are, of course, not unimaginable. However, it must be clearly seen that in the fields of research where the elements and building-blocks of SDI are to be developed, unsurmountable obstacles seem to be looming. Objects some 100 metres in length and weighing thousands of tons would have to be launched into orbit on the basis of scientific knowledge available now or in the near future whereas, even on the basis of the most optimal forecasts, such plans would have no credibility in less than half a century. Or take the problem of having a source for the immense bursts of energy to be stationed in space, or the problem of the so-called "miracle computers" required to command and control all the component parts of the system -- without ever having had any real-life tests. Theoretical, computer-simulated tests will never be able to reproduce all the eventualities that life can produce.

All this only serves to illustrate the dangers, to which the United States Administration is about to expose the world with the steps to be taken towards the realization of its Strategic Defence Initiative.

But for a moment, let us suppose that a fully automatic SDI system is realizable. What guarantees are there for its fail-safe, error-free operation? In the period from 1981 to 1985, more than 100 missile attacks against the United States were flashed on United States military computer screens. Fortunately, there was enough time in those cases to check on the alerts and determine that they were caused by computer errors. Occasionally it might take as much as 30 minutes to find out that a signal was false. But at least there existed that margin of time to prevent buttons from being pressed. Now that possibility is a thing of the past. As a consequence of