

(Mr. Vejvoda, Czechoslovakia)

Outer space still might seem to some of us a distant and remote sphere. But it becomes more and more obvious that what happens there, especially from the military point of view, is going to concern all of us very closely, and probably very soon. In a couple of weeks it will be already three years since the day when one major country proclaimed one form of the militarization of outer space as its official doctrine. From then on, year by year, huge financial resources and the skill of thousands of technicians were dedicated to that programme. As the years go by, more and more will be poured into this enterprise until one day it may become an unstoppable self-supporting machinery. Let us hope that this day will not come sooner than the negotiations on the non-militarization of outer space are given a fair chance. Otherwise it is inconceivable that, with the progressive militarization of outer space, any significant results in the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament can be achieved.

My country has sent a cosmonaut into outer space and in close co-operation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries participates actively in the peaceful exploration of outer space. We, certainly, do not consider ourselves a space power, but even as a small earthly country we would feel directly threatened by the eventual introduction into orbit of attack space weapons. Already now we have to face an immense threat to our territory from a multitude of sources, including modern missiles with nuclear warheads stationed just a couple of kilometres from our border. If an additional source of threat were to be introduced, this time from space, with practically no chances for defence, an explanation that these weapons should allegedly play a defensive role would hardly dispel our worries. And this potential threat is steadily gaining more and more specific shape. Nuclear-weapon testing in Nevada continues intensively, aimed at the perfectioning of X-ray lasers to be placed in outer space. Declarations on the non-nuclear nature of the so-called Strategic Defense Initiative thus seem rather misplaced and one should not be surprised if they are soon forgotten completely. At the same time, militarized space is not going to replace the old dangers but merely add to them. Just last week, Defense Secretary Weinberger stated that the SDI now shares the "highest priority" among Pentagon programmes, equal in status to the five-year campaign to modernize nuclear missiles.

In view of these developments, Czechoslovakia welcomes what the recent Soviet proposal has to say on outer space. It is suggesting a completely different approach which would not bring a threat to all countries, and in the long run also to the initiator of the arms race in space, but on the contrary it would definitely close outer space for military confrontation and would also create favourable conditions for nuclear disarmament. In the statement by M. Gorbachev, introducing the new Soviet initiative, the following question is put: "Instead of wasting next 10-15 years by developing new extremely dangerous weapons in space, allegedly designed to make nuclear arms useless would it not be more sensible to start eliminating those arms and finally bring them down to zero?". Apparently, no political leader would openly question this simple truth. Nor, let us hope, will it finally be denied through the actions of any country.

The Conference on Disarmament should contribute to multilateral efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space. We therefore support early resumption of the activity of the Ad Hoc Committee on Outer Space. As to its mandate, we made it clear last year that we want a committee empowered to negotiate specific measures ensuring prevention of an arms race in outer space. After last year's useful exploratory work we are even more convinced that time has come to move forward and to speak specifically on what new measures could ensure that outer space remains free of the arms race. General Assembly resolution 40/87 calls for nothing less than that.