

(Mr. Edis, United Kingdom)

It is in this spirit that we welcome the initiation of bilateral talks between the United States and the Soviet Union aimed inter alia at preventing an arms race in outer space. We must all hope that these negotiations between the two major space Powers will produce results.

Against this backdrop of existing and potential military use of space, and the opening of the bilateral negotiations, the Ad Hoc Committee of this Conference has begun its work of examining issues relevant to the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The Committee has made a good start to its work under the calm and able chairmanship of Ambassador Alfarargi of Egypt. It was right that the Committee's programme of work should encompass an examination of existing agreements. A full understanding and appreciation of the present legal régime in outer space is essential before additional measures which may be necessary can be considered. Substantive contributions on this topic were made by several delegations, but it would only be fair to single out the wide-ranging documentation tabled by the delegation of Canada (CD/618). My own delegation made a contribution to the process by tabling a working paper entitled "Principal international agreements which apply or otherwise relate directly or indirectly to outer space" (CD/OS/WP.7). In view of the encouraging comments that we received on this paper, we have now decided to table it as a document of the Conference, as CD/637.

It was clear from the Committee's examination of existing agreements that there already exists a considerable body of international law and practice, both multilateral and bilateral, bearing on the question of outer space. Indeed, it was remarked with justification that the arms control régime in outer space, which does not at present constitute a permanently inhabited area, is in many ways more comprehensive than that on Earth; for example, in banning the use of nuclear weapons in space and from space to Earth. Military activities on, and military activities from the Moon and other celestial bodies are also forbidden. And at least implicit immunity is accorded by existing agreements and practice to certain satellites which constitute national technical means of verification. These conclusions seemed to be common ground in the Committee, although the limited time permitted did not allow for exhaustive examination of the subject.

The Committee's look at existing proposals and future initiatives was also necessarily preliminary and tentative, though a number of interesting proposals meriting further examination were made. These included the establishment of a "rules of the road" agreement for outer space; the possible multilateralization of existing bilateral agreements, for example, in relation to the immunity of certain satellites; international monitoring of satellites; and the possibility of constraints upon elements of anti-satellite activity.

One point that came very clearly out of the discussion, especially of the latter two points, was the sheer complexity as well as the importance of verification in relation to additional measures of arms control in outer space. This applies particularly with regard to proposals of a far-reaching nature. In space as on Earth, proposals for unverifiable blanket bans are not only useless but, worse than that, they are disingenuous and potentially dangerous too. What we should be searching for are not easy propaganda gestures, but rather realistic