

(Mr. Onkelinx, Belgium)

The second question I wish to refer to today is that of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We are pleased that the Committee on Disarmament has placed this item on its agenda and that it has agreed to hold informal meetings on the subject in the near future.

Having said this, we recognize that not all the items on the Committee's agenda offer the same possibilities for negotiations. This question is a new item, which the Committee is taking up for the first time, and it is important because of its implications for the security of our States. It is necessary, at this initial stage, for the Committee to explore the subject.

The obligation to take up this question arises from paragraph 80 of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly. As early as 1979, Italy proposed that the matter be taken up when it submitted document CD/9. At the last session of the General Assembly two resolutions were adopted -- neither of them gave rise to any objection, and one of them, resolution 36/97 C, was co-sponsored by Belgium -- requesting the Committee on Disarmament to take up this matter for consideration.

Our objective ought therefore to be to try gradually to fill the gaps in the existing international legislation.

At present, such legislation rests principally on the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. It would also be useful to take into account the implications for outer space of the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty and the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems.

We ought further to consider the possible connections between the prevention of the arms race in outer space and the establishment of an international satellite monitoring agency, which was the subject, in particular, of General Assembly resolution 34/83 E, co-sponsored by Belgium.

We believe that initially the main aim of the Committee's work should be the question of the negotiation of an effective and verifiable agreement prohibiting anti-satellite systems. At the present stage, such systems constitute the greatest identifiable destabilizing threat.

In fact, anti-satellite weapons could seriously compromise the mechanisms designed to ensure respect for arms control and disarmament agreements.

Particular attention ought also to be given to methods of verifying such a prohibition, with reference again, to the subject of the prohibition. This would imply, among other things, a definition of the concept of arms in relation to outer space. My delegation hopes that at the informal meetings we are shortly to hold it will already be possible to clarify some of these questions.

It would also be useful, I think, if the Committee could consider, in the light of its priorities, the most appropriate procedural arrangements to enable us to begin substantive discussions in the most effective manner possible at our summer session.