

(Mr. Franceschi, Italy)

My statement today will be devoted to item 5 of our agenda: prevention of an arms race in outer space, a subject to which my Government, as is well known, has long attached special importance. In this connection I would like to recall that Italy was one of the first countries to work for a multilateral dialogue in the field of arms control in space. My Government did not confine itself to acceding to international instruments in this field but also in 1978 took the initiative at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament of proposing new measures to prevent an arms race in outer space, a proposal which was reflected in paragraph 80 of the Final Document.

Great attention is indeed devoted to the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space both at the political level and in the wider context of public opinion. We believe that this is rightly so, because arms control issues related to space have a very significant bearing on international stability and, therefore, on international peace and security.

We therefore witnessed with a feeling of satisfaction and confidence the launching in 1985, after several years' efforts, of the activities of an Ad Hoc Committee on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Even if it occurred quite late in the session, only allowing nine meetings on substantive problems, the discussions have been most useful. A carefully balanced programme of work has in fact allowed a first exchange of views, under the enlightened chairmanship of Ambassador Alfarargy of Egypt, on the general aspects of the military use of space, the relevant legal régime and the proposals made so far to prevent an arms race in outer space.

The discussion in the Ad Hoc Committee, although brief and thus somewhat superficial, showed the great complexity of the issue to be discussed, as lucidly described by the representative of Sri Lanka, Ambassador Dhanapala, in his remarkable statement of 30 July 1985. This same discussion has nevertheless opened the way for consideration in greater depth of the more significant problems relating to the prevention of an arms race in space. The analysis of proposals has only just begun; these proposals in many cases call for a further elaboration by their authors. But what seems particularly important in this context is a consideration of the question of effective verification mechanisms. The in-depth study of the problems, concepts, existing agreements and proposals should therefore be pursued, as it has proved useful and promising. The work-programme adopted last year gives us the widest chance to proceed in this direction. The assistance of experts might also be valuable for the consideration of a subject which, in its novelty, needs a thorough examination of almost all its aspects in order to achieve concrete progress at the multilateral level.

Under these auspices, the Ad Hoc Committee can make an important contribution in the field of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, thus responding to the attention with which this question is now deeply perceived.

For our part, we think that an in-depth consideration of many important aspects of this issue is possible -- and indeed necessary -- in this forum.

The General Assembly of the United Nations itself, in its resolution 40/87 of 12 December 1985 (paragraphs 4 and 6) seems to have implicitly drawn a distinction between certain issues that should be dealt