

(Mr. Alessi, Italy)

We see, therefore, wisdom in considering the adoption, prior to or parallel with more incisive measures of arms control, of collateral steps that would be aimed at increasing confidence, at avoiding provocative or ambiguous actions in space and at helping to ease the way for disarmament negotiations proper.

One such step has been evoked many a time in the past, lately by the distinguished representative of France on 12 June: it would consist in the strengthening and expansion of the 1974 United Nations Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

I would like to be more specific on this point: damage to spacecraft by co-orbital approach with a manoeuvred object at orbital velocity (about 8 Km/sec or less) which uses techniques which bear a general resemblance to the rendezvous and docking operations; these latter operations are routinely conducted by some nations and are likely to become more and more important in the peaceful exploitation of outer space. The two kinds of operations can perhaps be distinguished by noting that rendezvous requires a very long time (several orbits) and a very small relative velocity (e.g. a few cm/sec); therefore in the final phase the orbital elements of the two objects would have to be almost equal. The instrumental techniques required in the two cases, however, (infrared sensors, radars or lasers) would be similar and some ambiguity may arise.

On the other hand, collision between spacecraft, especially in the geosynchronous orbit, are a possibility and there is a safety problem for civilian operations as well.

Steps can be taken to make space more secure by agreeing on minimum separation distances for satellites in orbit or in transit to orbit (including those belonging to the same owner). An official statement would be required, beforehand, whenever such a regulation would have to be suspended for justified reasons.

Another positive step would be the prompt communication to an international authority of the full orbital elements of every object launched into space and a more detailed description of its mission on the basis of a standardized reporting instrument. This would involve a modification of the 1974 United Nations Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space. At present, parties to that Convention are free to provide whatever kind of information they wish on their launches, and in the format they wish. The result is that such information is too sketchy and difficult to compare.

Co-operative measures to permit ready verification of orbit and general function could also be envisaged on the basis of article IX of the Outer Space Treaty, which calls for prior consultations on activities that would "cause potentially harmful interference with the activities of other States Parties".

The 1974 Registration Convention provides also, at least in part, a basis for the identification of interest in a space object. The elaboration of a detailed set of principles or circumstances which would identify a space object as one covered by a future arms control agreement would also be of primary importance.

The question of ownership, control, or other elements of interest in and responsibility for a space object is a delicate question to be solved with priority in the appropriate forum, in particular at a time when joint space ventures, including commercial ventures, are becoming more and more numerous.

I have tried today to put forward some ideas that we consider relevant for a better understanding of the complexity of the subject-matter.

The establishment of a subsidiary body remains of the utmost importance and urgency in order to deal with the identification of those aspects which are related to arms control and disarmament and provide a possibility of concrete negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament.