

(Mr. Edis, United Kingdom)

On outer space, the Conference was able this year to establish an Ad Hoc Committee and begin serious work; on radiological weapons and the protection of nuclear facilities, there was a more sensible examination of the issues at stake; and on the comprehensive programme of disarmament we succeeded in clearing up some of the outstanding points in the draft text.

Outer space was the newest and in many ways the most challenging issue confronting the Conference this year.

As the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, has noted, President Reagan's vision in his statement of March 1983 made a decisive impact in several respects. It focused interest on existing military activities in space, and on new weapons systems which might theoretically be deployed or aimed there. It also drew to public attention the very considerable research under way in the Soviet Union on a range of potential measures.

At present, space is used by a limited number of military systems. Firstly, by communications, early-warning, and reconnaissance satellites, which add significantly to the effectiveness and credibility of mutual deterrence. They are efficient and cost-effective and make a unique contribution to stability. Secondly, by reusable launchers: by their nature they are, however, too limited, too costly and too vulnerable to pose a threat of aggression. The Soviet Union is now developing a similar system to the space shuttle, and we are hearing less condemnation from that quarter. Thirdly, there is the potential transit of space for the delivery of nuclear warheads by ballistic missiles based on Earth, which we must seek to ensure remains an unrealized potential. Fourthly, there is the problem of anti-satellite systems, exacerbated by the Soviet deployment over the past decade of a capability in this field, which it is only prudent for the West to balance.

As regards future systems, which in the words of the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, are many, many years away, the United States is publicly, and the Soviet Union more covertly, engaged in research programmes, which are permitted under the 1972 ABM Treaty. On this issue, Her Majesty's Government's policy is clear. At Camp David last December, Mrs. Thatcher agreed with President Reagan on four points:

The United States and Western aim is not to achieve superiority but to maintain balance, taking account of Soviet deployments;

Strategic Defensive Initiative-related deployment would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter for negotiation;

The overall aim is to enhance, not undermine deterrence; and

East/West negotiation should aim to achieve security with reduced levels of offensive systems on both sides.