

Mr. ALESSI (Italy): Mr. Chairman, since I spoke last, other eminent members of this Committee have left. It is with regret that I note the departure of the distinguished representatives of Yugoslavia, Ambassador Vrhunec, and Algeria, Ambassador Salah-Bey, and wish them well in their new assignments. At the same time, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the new representative of Peru, Ambassador Cannock, who, I am certain, will give an appreciable contribution to the work of this Committee.

I would like to address today item 7 of our agenda, entitled "Prevention of an arms race in outer space". I am glad to note that the Committee has allocated formal plenary meetings for this item and that our discussions progress with the active participation of all delegations. In this regard, we have listened with attention to the very interesting contribution just made by the distinguished delegate of Sri Lanka, Mr. Clarke, who spoke with the knowledge, the eloquence and the frankness we would expect from an expert of his reputation.

The recently concluded United Nations Conference devoted to the peaceful uses of outer space (UNISPACE '82) should serve as a further inducement for us to advance with determination in our substantive examination. It is to the credit of the United Nations, in particular of the COPUOS, the motive force in international co-operation, that progress in space-science and technology is being achieved in an orderly manner and benefiting mankind as a whole. The Committee on Disarmament is called upon to complement that work from a different angle, that of arms control and disarmament proper. In carrying out this exploratory stage of our proceedings, we have to bear in mind the goal that this Committee, heeding the recommendations of the General Assembly, has set for itself. Our task is not just to deal in general with space-related weaponry, but to try to prevent an arms race in this new dimension of human activity. It is therefore essential to have a clear perception of the avenue or avenues whereby an arms race might be introduced into outer space. We regard the present stage of our work as mainly directed towards acquiring that perception which, in turn, would enable us to establish an order of priorities and to orient our future endeavours.

The view of my delegation in that regard is known: we believe that the development of physical and technical means to destroy or damage space objects or to interfere with their operation is the most immediately threatening problem confronting us. We believe that in this specific area the ingredients for a military competition are present: the importance of satellites as targets, the development of a panoply of physical and technical anti-satellite means which would give the holder a considerable strategic advantage, the difficulties of protecting satellites by making them less vulnerable etc., all these factors could set in motion -- in our view -- the reactive cycle which characterizes an arms race.

Besides anti-satellites systems, more exotic types of weapons have been mentioned in the course of our discussions, notably the "directed energy weapons". That old favourite of science-fiction writers, the laser gun, as well as particle-beam weapons have been mentioned as having a specific potential as space-related weapons. By this term of space-related weapons we mean weapons that are such by reason of the location of the weapon launcher or the location of the target. However, whether and when this potential can be translated into an operational capability remains a moot question.