

(Mr. Cabras, Italy)

Foremost among these issues is the definitional question of what constitutes an "anti-satellite system". The vulnerability of satellites to an array of weapons and techniques makes a solution particularly arduous. How broadly is the term "anti-satellite system" to be construed? Should it only encompass weapons specifically designed to damage or destroy a satellite and their components? Should it also comprise any weapon constructed and deployed for an ASAT role, or tested in an ASAT mode? Would it be possible or desirable to identify the various types of ASAT systems?

In addition, the even more difficult issue would arise of what constitutes an "anti-satellite activity". In fact, without necessarily damaging or destroying the satellite, it is possible to interfere with its functioning, for instance through electronic jamming or by blinding it with lasers or by moving it from its orbit, etc.

Adequate verification, which is an essential requirement of any arms control and disarmament agreement, would, in this case, be very difficult to achieve. Even a limited ASAT capability, acquired or retained in evasion of an ASAT ban, could be significant. For this very reason, a comprehensive consideration of the problem could not avoid the question of disarmament per se. Operational capabilities in this field are already a reality. The issue of dismantling procedures for existing ASAT systems and their components, and the related verification procedures, would be yet another very complex issue.

Any draft treaty or proposal purporting to deal with the problem of ASAT systems should be judged in the light of the whole range of issues involved in this highly sensitive area and on the basis of the answers it provides to them.

What, for instance, would be the value, in terms of arms control and disarmament, of an agreement that amounted to a "no-use" arrangement? If ASAT systems can be freely tested or deployed, would not each side anticipate that they might be used, and take appropriate measures? It can be argued that anything less than a prohibition of testing, deployment and use would be seriously flawed.

The opportunity before us is ripe, but perishable. As a result of the broad examination that we are going to commence on this item, we need to identify our real priorities, lest we disperse our energies. If we want to keep outer space free from any kind of weapons, should we not start with those weapons that already exist, that have been deployed?

We are aware that this would be only a step, a first step, in a process.

Consistent with its long-standing interest in the field, the Italian delegation stands ready to contribute further to the work of the Committee on item 7, but most of all it stands ready to listen, to learn and to give serious consideration to any suggestion or proposal which can serve to advance our common endeavour.