

(Mr. Beesley, Canada)

I must now address an issue whose importance and urgency can hardly be over-emphasized. I refer to the question of arms control and outer space.

We have viewed with considerable apprehension and regret the apparent inability of the Conference on Disarmament to come to grips with the very real and pressing problems of arms control and outer space, an issue with a potential for seriously destabilizing effects, not to mention the possible financial outlays of almost unimaginable dimensions. It would be unproductive, as we see it, to attempt to attribute responsibility for lack of movement in this issue. The fact is that no ad hoc working group was established last year and we have not yet been able to agree on the creation of a subsidiary body at the current session. Let me suggest that, as in the case of our goal of a nuclear test ban, we use the experience gained in other areas of negotiation to recognize the essentials required. We are facing an almost unique situation in that this Conference is being offered an opportunity -- and a challenge -- to tackle a new, substantive and vital issue. No matter what the scope of the mandate agreed to, initially, surely no one would deny that certain basic research is required. It is not unreasonable to assume that a survey of existing treaties and international law as it pertains to the subject is a necessary first step. It follows that the definitional aspects also constitute basic and essential elements which must be addressed at the outset.

I suggest therefore that we can and should agree immediately to the format of an ad hoc committee to take up these aspects and if possible other aspects of the outer space issue. If past experience is an example, there is more than enough work to occupy an ad hoc committee with such a mandate for the remainder of the summer part of the session. In any case, upon the successful and, we hope, speedy fulfilment of this initial mandate, the Conference could then move to other and more detailed consequential aspects of the issue.

In case there is any doubt as to where Canada stands on this matter, I would remind the Conference that Prime Minister Trudeau at the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in June 1982, urged the international community to undertake the negotiation of a treaty to ban weapons for use in outer space. This remains one of the most important Canadian arms control objectives. Indeed, Canada was one of the first delegations to table, in this Conference, a substantive working paper on the subject in 1982. That paper dealt with the stabilizing and destabilizing features of systems in space. Our message then was that in dealing with the outer space issue, it would be necessary to consider, with all due deliberation, the over-all net effects on a system-by-system basis. For example, the arms control aspects of reconnaissance satellites might well outweigh their targeting capabilities.