(Mr. Cabras, Italy)

Even a cursory reading of this study suffices to give a good idea of the efficiency of satellites and of their extreme versatility. Their use extends to fields as diverse as meteorology, cartography, geodesy, communications, reconnaissance, navigation, early warning, etc. Reconnaissance satellites provide the most effective means of verifying compliance with certain disarmament agreements and play a stabilizing role in crisis-monitoring. The use of early warning satellites contributes to international security and confidence.

Many current and potential uses of satellites are of great importance for the economic and social development of all countries, particularly the developing countries.

The relevant technology is no longer the monopoly of two States; other nations possess a national capacity in this field, while a number of others participate in the implementation of space programmes through organs of international co-operation.

The importance of satellites and the dependence of States, of all States, on them are likely to increase: in many instances, satellites provide unique capabilities, capabilities that cannot readily be duplicated by ground-based systems; for certain other missions they are cost-effective or perform with higher efficiency.

These very characteristics, together with their vulnerability, make satellites, virtually all satellites, tempting targets. Outer space is at present a medium still mainly free from kill-mechanisms. Yet the deployment of anti-satellite systems marks the beginning of a trend that, unless checked, can introduce the arms race into this new dimension.

Without, for the time being, going into the complex details of the various anti-satellite systems, be they at the experimental stage or at the operational stage, it is sufficient to note that in this sector the ingredients for a military competition seem to be 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 advantage, the difficulties of protecting satellites by making them less vulnerable, etc. -- all these factors could set in motion the reactive cycle which characterizes an arms race.

It is easier to forecast an arms race in the anti-satellite system sector than to indicate its likely consequences. It seems clear, however, that it would be extremely costly, strategically "destabilizing", and disruptive for the orderly exploitation of outer space in the interest of all mankind. Resolution 36/97 C describes the negotiation of an agreement on the matter as "an important step" towards preventing an arms race in space and assigns priority to it. Its consideration would be an appropriate task for the Committee on Disarmament, as it would constitute a genuine disarmament measure, entailing a ban on systems which are in existence, which form part of military arsenals, which are deployed.

It would be premature to undertaken even a preliminary analysis of the issues involved in the question of anti-satellite systems. It would, however, be useful to try to glimpse the complexity of some of these to demonstrate that a serious consideration of them would already constitute a formidable task in itself.