

(Mr. Teja, India)

Satellites, for our country as for many others, are a part of an effort to use technology for the benefit of our peoples. We are all aware of the applications of satellites in telecommunications, meteorology, remote-sensing, navigation and scientific research. At the same time, these very functions also have another aspect: the verification of arms limitation agreements. More recently, wartime combat support functions have also been included in satellite capability. While some may be indirect, i.e., in the areas of communications and navigation, others may be more direct, such as radar location of targets and navigational guidance for attack missiles. Perceptions of these attributes and their development have, side by side, also spurred attempts to develop anti-satellite weapons. If satellites have been accepted as an aid to confidence building by virtue of their role in verification, then putting them at risk would only serve to exacerbate tensions and have a destabilizing effect on any crisis.

In virtually all missile defence concepts, satellites are foreseen to perform essential functions, either as sensors or as relay stations in the attack, and they must, therefore, possess a defensive capability. This is the close connection between the development of the BMD systems and the development of the improved anti-satellite systems, in addition to the inherent ASAT potential of many BMD systems. It is, however, the distinctions between BMD systems and the ASAT systems which are more significant for us, as these indicate the approach that can be adopted to develop a treaty banning ASAT weapons. The significant ASAT methods like spacemines, jamming and deception measures and attacks on ground stations, have no BMD analogue. The levels of performance for a BMD and for attacking satellites are very different. ASAT can be mounted from a friendly territory, its targeting is relatively easier and can be undertaken over a long period of time, its survivability is easier as it is likely to operate in a crisis situation rather than in a hostility situation -- in short, while the technology is similar, the technical differences between an effective BMD system and an ASAT system are significant.

These distinctions are relevant in designing any ASAT ban -- which, to be comprehensive and effective, must not only ban testing, development and deployment of all ASAT weapons but also eliminate existing such weapons. Even at present, the issues of verification and compliance are likely to require considerable reserves of political goodwill and trust before they can be resolved; with any delay in the undertaking of negotiations and possibly if faced with deployment, it would become that much more difficult. One possible structure for such a treaty could be in the form of a general formulation, with specific protocols applicable to different categories of satellites. Evidently, the categorization of today may not remain as exhaustive for tomorrow. This explains the necessity for separate protocols, which can be derived from and placed under the umbrella of the general treaty formulations. For the present, three categories for which specific protocols could be relevant would be NEO (Near-Earth Orbits), HEO (Higher Earth Orbits) and GEO (Geosynchronous Orbits). However, this is merely indicative and not an exhaustive listing. The formulation of the general provision would be an indicator of the underlying political commitment. Elements of such a proposal have already been tabled in this Conference and it is now necessary that we take a comprehensive look at it.