

Mr. van DONGEN (Netherlands): I should like to avail myself of the provision of rule 30 of the Rules of Procedure to refer to agenda item 7 on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The Netherlands welcomes the decision of this Committee to put this item on its agenda. We hold that the time is more than ripe to take up this subject; further delay would only increase its complexity, which is, even now, awesome. In his statement of 2 February 1982, Ambassador Fein outlined our approach to it. Having listened attentively to the arguments put forward by certain delegations, we acquiesced in its absence from the programme of work for the Committee's spring session. At the same time, we welcomed the decision to hold informal meetings to consider item 7; I hope that, on that occasion, I made our constant interest in the matter abundantly clear.

We are of course aware that a few nations play a preponderant role in the exploration and the use of outer space and that, for other members of this Committee, many of the technical aspects are hard to grasp. At the same time, the fact that possible arms competition in outer space would directly affect the military balance and therefore our joint security confers on us the right and even the duty to speak out.

When I do so today, my primary objective is to encourage further discussion and continued awareness that the major contribution can only come from the two great Powers and that a lasting solution is feasible only if the two of them can come to agree with one another.

The military use of outer space seems to have three main aspects:

- (a) Military satellites are increasingly being used to fulfil functions of direct military relevance such as observation, navigation, communications and crisis monitoring;
- (b) As a result, the same satellites are becoming high-priority military targets, since their elimination will directly affect the adversary's military capabilities. This has resulted in increased research, development and, in some cases, even tests of so-called interceptor satellites in orbit;
- (c) Increased research in the field of directed-energy weapons, both high-energy laser and particle-beam weapons, has made it conceivable that they may be used both for space-based ballistic missile defence and as anti-satellite weapons.

We are, of course, aware of the fact that, since the 1960s, a number of international agreements have been concluded restricting the military use of outer space; of these, the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, deserves special mention. This Treaty prohibits the placing in orbit around the earth of any objects carrying nuclear weapons of mass destruction, the installation of such weapons on celestial bodies and the stationing of such weapons in outer space in any other manner. It also calls for the complete demilitarization of the moon and other celestial bodies. Though it is an important step forward, the Outer Space Treaty leaves room for a variety of military activities in outer space. I note by way of illustration that none of the three ways of militarizing outer space which I outlined earlier is prohibited by the provisions of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.