

(Mr. Cabras, Italy)

My delegation understands the concern expressed by the distinguished Ambassador of Egypt at the plenary meeting of 18 February not to lose sight of the goal of preserving outer space for peaceful uses only, in the interests of all peoples of the world.

This should indeed remain our common goal, in keeping with the principles set forth in resolution 1962 (XVIII) unanimously adopted by the General Assembly at its eighteenth session. The Committee on Disarmament should make its contribution towards the achievement of this goal in the field which is proper to this negotiating forum, concentrating on the specific objective we have set for ourselves, that is, the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

My delegation feels that the problems of outer space cannot be effectively solved through an all-embracing approach of the kind devised in 1961 for the Antarctic. The earliest of the post-World War II arms limitation agreements could hardly provide, in 1982, a suitable pattern for a comparable treatment of outer space.

We share the opinion, widely supported also in the scientific community, that such an approach would result merely in the delaying of urgently needed, more limited measures which are within the bounds of feasibility and can effectively curb the most immediately threatening developments. To tackle effectively the disarmament issues relating to outer space, we have to place them in a forward-looking perspective and identify priorities. These issues are not stationary: they evolve at the pace of technology which, in the case of outer space, is particularly rapid. Some of them cannot wait for over-all progress on all fronts. Without establishing an order of priorities we may just be creating a storehouse of highly volatile problems with potentially harmful consequences for the future of our endeavours.

The two States with major space-capabilities seem to have established an order of priorities for themselves when, between 1978 and 1979, they held three rounds of bilateral talks on the limitation of anti-satellite systems. The work in the First Committee last year showed that a growing number of countries appear to be aware that the testing and deployment of physical and technical means to destroy, damage or interfere with space objects constitutes the most immediately threatening development.

A survey of specialized literature indicates that this is also a largely shared opinion among experts and scientists.

Let us dwell for a moment on this aspect.

The existence of many public sources describing in detail the activities currently performed by satellites saves my delegation from having to refer to this aspect at length, at least at the present stage. One such source is the "Study on the implications of establishing an international satellite monitoring agency", drawn up by a group of governmental experts and annexed to document A/AC.206/14 of 6 August 1981. It offers a very useful general survey.