

(Mr. Qian Jiadong, China)

While emphasizing the importance and urgency of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, we do not in the least underestimate the complexity of the question. The systematic analysis of various existing space weapon systems, as well as those in the development stage, made by the distinguished Swedish Ambassador, Mr. Ekéus, in his statement of 22 March, and by Ambassador Theorin in her statement today, can be termed exemplary. The complexity of the question should serve all the more as a reason for us to start negotiations as early as possible and not a pretext for procrastination.

In our view, the primary task at present should be the prohibition of all space weapons, including anti-satellite weapons, which impair the stability of outer space. This should include a ban on the development, testing, production, deployment and use of such weapons and the destruction of existing space weapon systems. Admittedly, this can be achieved only through many concrete measures. In this connection, the series of measures which should and can be taken, as proposed by Ambassador Ekéus, merits our serious study and exploration.

We are aware that it is difficult to carry on a comprehensive discussion of the relevant issues all at once. However, we can at least begin with the most fundamental and least controversial ones. In our view, the definition of space weapons is one such fundamental question. A breakthrough on this question will give impetus to the whole process of negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The definition of space weapons is not a new subject. Proposals have been put forward by some delegations in the past. The Chinese delegation would also like to make an attempt here, and tentatively proposed the following:

Space weapons are devices or installations, either space-, land-, sea-, or atmosphere-based, which are specially designed to attack or destroy spacecraft in outer space or damage and disturb their normal functioning or change their flight trajectory, and devices or installations based in space (including on the moon and other celestial bodies) specially designed to attack, damage or disturb the normal functioning of objects in the atmosphere as well as on land and sea.

We do not regard this definition as perfect. Further thought and reflection may be needed for it to denote the characteristics of space weapons in concise and precise terms. Our aim is to draw attention to the matter and to facilitate joint exploration.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is indeed a difficult task. However, we must not lose sight of a more favourable aspect. Not a few delegations have enumerated and analysed the existing treaties, agreements and other international legal documents concerning or relevant to outer space. In spite of the shortcomings and loopholes, those documents have on the whole affirmed the fundamental principle that outer space should be used for peaceful purposes. The Treaty on Principles Governing State Activities in the Exploration and Utilization of Outer Space Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies of 1967 provides further that the activities of States in outer space should be carried out in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter. These are achievements resulting from the endeavours of countries for many years. With such a basis, it should be possible to elaborate through negotiations an international legal instrument on the comprehensive prohibition of space weapons.