

(Mr. de Beausse, France)

Recognition of the role of the Committee on Disarmament

In addition to the two competing resolutions, 36/99 and 36/97 C -- France was one of the sponsors of the latter -- which were adopted at the last session of the General Assembly, we now have, as several speakers have noted, the consensus reached at the United Nations Conference, UNISPACE '82. It is to be hoped that this will have put an end to a potentially harmful situation which would have led to a regrettable duplication of the work of the Committee on Disarmament and that of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

We hope that we can interpret the settlement of this conflict of competence as recognition of the complexity of the space element and its growing importance in the consideration of matters relating to the balance of forces and international security. This recognition should lead to acceptance of its corollary, namely, the fact that questions concerning the arms race in outer space now no longer concern the two major space Powers only, even if those Powers clearly have a particular and direct responsibility in this regard because of their existing or potential military capabilities.

It is true that the importance attaching to the work of our Committee is also connected with the inadequacy of the existing legal instruments in view of the foreseeable developments in technology.

Contrary to a widely held opinion, technological developments in the next 10 or 20 years are fairly easy to foresee: space programmes respond as much to the internal logic determined by the extent of the technical and financial investments put into them as to political promptings.

For more than a quarter of a century, outer space has been seen essentially in terms of support for military means of observation and communication. The parallel with the early days of aviation is, moreover, quite remarkable in this respect.

Even if new laser-weapon or directed-energy systems are at present still far from being technologically feasible or economically viable, it seems likely that the idea of the orbital platform, either manned or automatic, capable of use for both civilian and military purposes, will become a reality. Both the orbital rendezvous techniques practised by the Soviet Union for some years and the capacities of the United States space shuttle point in this direction.

In other words, the essential problem up to now has been (and it still is) that of the immunity of the space segment of land-based weapons systems from possible pre-emptive enemy attacks. Although it is true that the space segment is specifically designed for a particular purpose (for example, data transmission, analysis of the environment in which land-based troop movements are taking place, the detection of positions), it is functionally indissociable from a land-based network of communications and control systems. Furthermore, it has no purpose except as part of a complex military organization.

The moment outer space can itself become the scene of specific military activities, whether these are directed against other space objects (such as enemy satellites) or against land-based activities (the trajectories of ballistic weapons, for example), the problem of the arms race in outer space takes on an entirely new dimension.