

My delegation has followed the debate on problems of outer space with great interest. In our view, the Committee has made a good beginning in approaching this topic in response to the relevant resolutions adopted at the last session of the General Assembly, one of which was co-sponsored by my delegation. The debate has quite clearly shown that there is a considerable difference of views concerning the method to be used in future work. Many delegations have subscribed to a pragmatic, gradual approach by which concrete negotiating steps would, in a first phase, be taken to deal effectively with the most threatening and destabilizing weapons systems, i.e. anti-satellite weapons, especially since such systems have already been tested and made operational by at least one country; anti-satellite technology is available and deployment may already have taken place. There is another approach which aims at a purportedly broader, non-specific ban on all arms in outer space, but places very little emphasis on real effectiveness. It is also difficult to see in what order of priority the various complex issues involved would be treated under this approach. While my delegation is in favour of every possible step designed to exclude non-peaceful uses of outer space, it would appear logical and appropriate to us to adopt a step-by-step approach and to build upon the existing body of international regulations in this field. The establishment of a working group to take this work in hand in the coming summer session of the Committee would be welcomed by my delegation, if the mandate reflects this approach. I would like to remind the Committee in this respect that General Assembly resolution 36/97 C specifically requests the Committee on Disarmament to consider, as a matter of priority, the question of negotiating an effective and verifiable agreement to prohibit anti-satellite systems. The mandate of a future working group would have to reflect this and, in our view, the Committee, acting accordingly, will have to avoid clogging the agenda of a working group with broad and hazy projects which would not allow the Committee to deal with concrete problems in a limited time and not aim at a really effective peaceful space régime.

My delegation has already given its view on outer space problems in a more comprehensive manner during one of the informal meetings devoted to the subject; the text of our statement has been made available to delegations in an informal manner. Now that I have the opportunity to speak on the subject in a formal meeting, allow me to reaffirm one clarification. The draft treaty of 10 August 1981 contained in document A/36/192 and referred to in General Assembly resolution 36/99 does not appear to my delegation to be a suitable basis for negotiation in this Committee. We have already pointed out the many contradictions and inconsistencies which this draft treaty displays. In this connection, my delegation has asked a certain number of questions which so far have found no reply. We, like the Italian and the Dutch delegations, still wait for the necessary elucidation from the authors of that draft. In addition to the lacunae and ambiguities of the draft to which we have already drawn attention let me briefly mention two others. Article III of the draft makes it legitimate to intercept space objects if these are not operated for peaceful purposes. However, the determination and decision whether interception should take place lies with the interceptor alone, who would thus take on the role of a self-appointed space police. In the absence of firm criteria and of any objective determination of prerequisites for such a police role, this draft provision would seem to pave the way for misuse and serve, rather, as an incentive for the development and testing of additional anti-satellite systems. Secondly, the rules on verification contained in article IV appear to be insufficient even in the light of other existing multilateral disarmament agreements and certainly in relation to the purposes of the draft treaty. In the view of my delegation it would be indispensable to have a substantially more detailed verification régime, with at least an independent investigating authority, such as a Consultative Committee, lest the desired prescription remain totally ineffective in terms of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. In the light of all these arguments and in conjunction with those already advanced, my delegation must confirm its view that the draft treaty in question is seriously flawed and