

(Mr. van den Broek, the Netherlands)

Turning to the realm of outer space, it is undeniably true that space holds out great promises of scientific co-operation and achievements for the benefit of all mankind. The world community should take care that military competition and destabilizing military activities will not take their place as prime characteristics of this vast expanse surrounding our globe. Various military functions in outer space are of a stabilizing nature, like satellites for observation, early warning and also, in many respects, those for communication. A call for the demilitarization of outer space, as sometimes heard, is therefore, in my view, not only politically unrealistic but, in fact, also damaging to stability.

The question of military developments in outer space is often associated with research by the United States, and the Soviet Union too, with regard to ballistic missile defence. Allow me two remarks on this. The first is that the whole matter relates as much to Earth as to space. In fact the only operational missile defence at this moment is ground-based. My second remark is that the issue of defensive systems cannot be seen in isolation from the so-called offensive systems. We have been witnessing some destabilizing first-strike tendencies in this field over the past decade. We attach great importance to an approach which seeks to counter such developments as part of the 50 per cent cuts, in conjunction with an extension of the period required for withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.

I have referred to the stabilizing nature of many satellites. Of course, this is not the case for all satellites: in particular, some of those in low orbit can be used for targeting. Banning all anti-satellite weapons would therefore pose serious problems. Moreover, it would hardly seem feasible because there are so many ways to destroy a satellite. But maybe it is not too late to seek some way of protecting satellites in high orbit, which are generally of a stabilizing nature. At a time when more countries are gradually acquiring satellites, at least for civilian purposes, this is becoming an issue for which a multilateral forum such as the Conference on Disarmament clearly has a role to play in addition to ongoing bilateral efforts.