

(Mr. Ahmad, Pakistan)

Mankind today stands at the threshold of an important turning-point. Outer space, which is the common heritage of mankind, is today being used extensively for military purposes. The majority of the space objects now in orbit serve military functions. There is a growing threat of the emergence of active space weapons and of ASAT and ABM weapons. Unless effective measures are taken to avert this danger, outer space will become yet another area of military competition and confrontation, severely restricting its use for peaceful purposes to promote the scientific, economic and social development of all countries.

Competition in the military uses of outer space would have grave consequences. It would exacerbate the current state of instability inherent in the deployment of global nuclear arsenals, give the arms race a qualitatively new dimension, undermine existing disarmament agreements and jeopardize the disarmament process as a whole.

The imminent threat of "weaponization" of outer space which faces us today underscores the urgency of initiating negotiations in the Conference. While it is relatively easy to stop the development of a weapon in its initial stage or before it is actually tested and deployed, it becomes much more difficult to prohibit after its production and deployment. The Conference must not therefore delay shouldering its important responsibility in this area; otherwise it may soon be too late to reverse this dangerous trend.

It is sometimes pointed out that the question of an arms race in outer space is best left to the two super-Powers, which are already engaged in talks on the subject in Geneva. My delegation finds this argument unconvincing. While we are prepared to admit that, by reason of their actual or potential military capabilities, the two super-Powers, which are also the two principal space Powers, have a special responsibility in this connection, questions relating to outer space are no longer today of concern only to them but equally to other members of the international community. Bilateral talks therefore do not diminish the need for multilateral negotiations. Only multilateral negotiations in the Conference can fully protect the rights of the international community. The super-Powers also have a responsibility to keep this Conference, and through it the General Assembly, informed of the progress of their talks.

The current legal régime regarding outer space is clearly inadequate for the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The rapid technological developments which have been taking place in the area of outer space have revealed serious deficiencies and loopholes in existing agreements. There is no agreement on such basic terms as "peaceful purposes" or "militarization". Agreements currently in force leave considerable room for various military activities, including deployment of a wide range of weapons, in particular ASAT weapons. Further developments in space technology could erode the existing space law and make it completely irrelevant.

The goal that we must set for ourselves is the complete prohibition of all space weapons, including weapons directed against targets in space such as ASAT systems, weapons which interfere in the functioning of space objects, and space-based ABM systems. Such a ban must also provide for effective verification provisions, including on-site inspection. Pending the