

(Mr. Franceschi, Italy)

On behalf of the Group of Western countries, I would like to address some concluding remarks on the work which has been done this year on item 5 of our agenda, that is, the prevention of an arms race in outer space. This is an objective to which Western countries are deeply committed. We are also of the view that it is a subject on which the Conference on Disarmament can play an important role.

In our view the Ad Hoc Committee on this item has achieved some useful work in this session. In this context we would like to congratulate Ambassador Bayart of Mongolia for the calm and efficient way in which he has guided this Committee in implementing its programme of work. Despite the regrettable delay in getting down to work, we were able to gather information which can assist our future endeavours. While some aspects of this topic have been usefully clarified, it is, however, apparent that in view of the limited time which has been available much still remains to be done.

One of the more helpful features of the Ad Hoc Committee this year has been the discussion and elucidation of the existing legal régime in relation to arms control and outer space. We have studied many of the important agreements in this area, which already play a wide-ranging role in the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Any further initiatives in this area should clearly build on these existing provisions and not duplicate them. We would also stress the importance of strict compliance with the existing legal régime and the importance of wider participation in it.

The Ad Hoc Committee has also given us the opportunity to examine some of the activities which are currently being carried on in outer space. It is clear that the use of outer space for military purposes has occurred since the start of the space age. Activities such as the use of satellites to monitor compliance with existing arms control agreements and the use of communications satellites have a stabilizing function and thereby contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is also apparent that to refer to outer space as a zone which is immune from use by certain active military systems is inaccurate. Apart from the fact that ballistic missiles are programmed to travel through space on the way to their targets, it is apparent that one country already has an existing and deployed ASAT system.

The Committee is clearly in need of more technical and other information. We would in particular call upon the Soviet Union to display the same degree of openness and transparency in regard to its activities in outer space as that which is already shown by other countries.

Apart from the study of technical matters to which I have referred there are several other areas which merit continuing and intensified consideration.

The contribution on terminology which your delegation has made, Mr. President, in Working Paper CD/OS/WP.15, is most pertinent and could help us in our future work.

It has in fact been apparent that much of the terminology used in this area is unclear, especially in relation to some of the new language being used. Terms such as "weaponization" and "militarization" are frequently used but often without clear or precise definition.