

(Mr. Alessi, Italy)

Other important questions traditionally appear on the Committee's agenda and will doubtless continue to appear thereon. My delegation intends to use the time set aside specifically for the consideration of those items to give its views on them. However, I should like to take this opportunity to express the hope that this year a suitable place will be given in the agenda and programme of work of the Committee for a new item concerning further measures to be adopted to prevent an arms race in outer space.

One of the special features of the discussions at the thirty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly was, in fact, the interest shown in the problems of arms control and disarmament in outer space. The many speeches made on this subject highlighted the conviction that the international community should urgently take further efforts to prevent an arms race in this new sphere of man's activity.

This interest led to the adoption of two resolutions which, for the first time, indicate the General Assembly's desire that the Committee on Disarmament should deal with this question, which is wholly in keeping with paragraph 60 of the Final Document.

Resolution 36/97 C, of which Italy was a sponsor, in its paragraph 3 requests the Committee on Disarmament "to consider, as from the beginning of its session in 1982, the question of negotiating effective and verifiable agreements aimed at preventing an arms race in outer space". It would be perfectly appropriate to envisage an initial exchange of views, in plenary, during this part of the session.

After such a survey or preliminary consideration of this very complex and sensitive issue, we shall be in a better position to decide on the most suitable procedures for taking concrete steps to follow up the discussions in the General Assembly. The rapid development of space technology in recent years raises clear and precise threats: some applications are no longer in the domain of scientific hypothesis but have already begun to be included in military arsenals. These must be identified, and efforts must be made to remedy this situation through the speedy negotiation of concrete, verifiable and effective measures.

That, in our view, is the meaning of the request made by the General Assembly to the Committee, the multilateral negotiating body in matters of disarmament, and the role which it could play in this field.

It would be vain to think it possible to resolve at once and effectively all the problems involved in the prevention of an arms race in space by means of some few articles of a treaty of a general character. Such an approach would merely delay our efforts and draw us away from our objective.

In this connection resolution 36/97 C, to which I have already referred, suggests the path to be followed: in its paragraph 4 the Committee on Disarmament is requested "to consider as a matter of priority the question of negotiating an effective and verifiable agreement to prohibit anti-satellite systems, as an important step towards the fulfilment of the objectives set out in paragraph 3 above".

It is generally acknowledged that the most threatening development, and the one that calls for the most immediate action, is the development of anti-satellite weapons systems. If this development were to remain uncontrolled, the basis for an arms race in outer space would already exist. This prospect should spur us to make a determined effort to avert, before it is too late, the real and immediate risks which exist in this field.