

(Mr. Beesley, Canada)

As we began our deliberations here a year ago, there was a note of cautious expectation in the air. The Governments of the USSR and the United States of America had only recently agreed to resume negotiations on the central arms control and disarmament issues of our time. Moreover, in taking this step, which entailed considerable statesmanship on each side, the two Governments set themselves agreed negotiating objectives which are impressive in their scope and comprehensiveness, namely: "The prevention of an arms race in space and its termination on Earth, the limitation and reduction of nuclear arms, and the strengthening of strategic stability." They stated as an ultimate goal "the complete elimination of nuclear weapons." We, and the watching world, saw a glimmer of hope.

Now, little more than a year later, that flame of hope not only remains alive, but burns a little brighter. Negotiators for the two Governments completed three rounds of negotiations in Geneva during 1985. President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev met in Geneva in November and issued an important Joint Statement, affirming inter alia the intent to accelerate the work of their negotiations. The fourth round of negotiations is already underway.

Another important item on our agenda is the prevention of an arms race in outer space, a subject on which there is widespread and legitimate public anxiety. Last year, an important step forward was taken when we were able to agree on a mandate for an Ad hoc Committee on this item. I pointed out at the time that it was a realistic mandate which takes into account and both complements and accurately reflects the realities concerning the bilateral negotiations already then under way between the United States and the USSR, but does not undermine or undercut or prejudge or in any way interfere with those negotiations. At the same time, I expressed the hope that the mandate would not expire at the end of 1985 bearing in mind the wishes of some delegations who would like something more and something better. The view I then expressed continues to be the view of the Canadian Government. The mandate has enabled us to make a beginning, but it has no means been exhausted. It was attained only with great difficulty, skill and perseverance. Any attempt to negotiate it or renegotiate it could almost certainly involve further lengthy discussion at the expense of substantive deliberation, with little prospect of agreement on a new mandate. Moreover, the political and negotiating context in which the mandate was agreed has not appreciably changed. Indeed, to the extent that the United States and the USSR are seriously coming to grips with the negotiating objectives they have set for themselves, including the prevention of an arms race in outer space, our need to ensure that our deliberations are complementary to, and not disruptive of, those negotiations is enhanced. Finally, I would note that, due to regrettable procedural delays, our substantive discussions on this item last year were seriously curtailed and as some delegations have pointed out, we were able to have only nine meetings. Nevertheless, those discussions, in the Canadian judgement, got off to a reasonably good start. They were substantive. They were for the most part objective. They went some way toward elucidating the complexities and intricacies -- technical, legal and political and we have heard of some of them today -- involved in this process. However, they remain incomplete. The importance and difficulty of the subject demand that we discharge our last year's mandate with determination and dispatch before we embark on a new one. The reputation of this Conference would not be enhanced by procedural wrangles on this item. As was the case last year when we submitted a broad survey on the existing international legal régime in outer space, the Canadian delegation intends to make concrete contributions to substantive discussions. In the process, we will be making available to all delegations, through the Secretariat, a compendium of the 1985 Conference on Disarmament documentation on the subject.