



UK Mission
Geneva

**OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON REDUCING SPACE THREATS THROUGH
NORMS, RULES AND PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOURS (FOURTH
SESSION)**

AGENDA ITEM 5: GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 28 August 2023

Mr Chair,

I will keep my opening remarks relatively brief, as we have a very busy week ahead of us. Before we get onto the substantive business of discussing our draft report, however, I did want to reflect on the remarkable journey that has brought us to this fourth and final meeting of the Open Ended Working Group.

That journey began almost three years ago when UN Member States voted overwhelmingly in favour of Resolution 75/36, which invited States to reflect on existing and potential threats to space systems, and on how these could be addressed through the development and implementation of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.

Since then, through the national reports that were submitted in response to that Resolution; the subsequent report from the Secretary General; and now through the work of this OEWG, the international debate on outer space security has, in my delegation's view, shifted significantly.

Through our discussions, we have improved our understanding of what each of us finds concerning, and potentially threatening, in the actions, activities and omissions of other States in, to, and from outer space. We may not all agree on what may be considered threatening, or on the solutions, but we have, we hope, improved mutual understanding, and in today's context, that is an important step forward in itself. It seems to us that the focus on behaviours rather than on capabilities has proved its worth.

We have made early, practical progress. The wide support for UNGA Resolution 77/41 calling on States to commit to not destructively test direct ascent anti-satellite

missiles is a clear step forwards in reducing threats to the space systems on which we all rely. We hope that more States will make this political commitment, and that such commitments will amount to a new, globally accepted norm of behaviour.

While ASAT testing is a pressing concern, it is not the only one. Thanks to the inclusive nature of the OEWG, we have ensured that all States, not just the established space-faring nations, have had the opportunity to express their concerns, and to put forward their ideas and proposals. We have been truly impressed by the constructive and substantive engagement from so many delegations over the course of this process.

We have been struck by the collaborative approach that so many Member States have demonstrated, including across what we might term traditional regional boundaries. The statement delivered just now by the distinguished Ambassador of the Philippines on behalf of 33 States is a great example of this, and we thank the delegations of Brazil, the Philippines, the Netherlands and Germany for their leadership of this initiative.

We have also taken a significant step forwards when it comes to bridging the perceived divide between legally-binding and politically-binding commitments. It is clear to us that these two approaches are complementary, and 'norms, rules and principles' encompasses both of these as well as traditional transparency and confidence-building measures. We have seen that there is increasing support amongst Member States for a pragmatic approach that encompasses all three types of measure in a complementary and mutually reinforcing way.

In this regard, we have always been clear that this OEWG is an important contribution to the objective of Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space, and that our work should be developed in a way that is coherent, not in competition, with other relevant initiatives, such as the upcoming Group of Governmental Experts.

Mr Chair,

No doubt we will have further opportunities to pay tribute to your excellent stewardship of our Working Group. For now, I would like to thank you and the Secretariat for your efforts since our last meeting to summarise our work so far in your 'Elements' papers, for engaging in wide-ranging consultations, and for producing a first draft of our final report, which we believe gives us a very good basis on which to work.

My delegation is optimistic that we can reach a consensus document. Our hope and expectation is that it will capture in a positive way the important steps forward we have already taken, along the lines that I have described; that it will fairly reflect the rich variety of concerns and ideas that delegations have put forward; and that it will

set clear direction for the continuation of discussions in the UN on the development of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.

I will end my remarks there Mr Chair, and look forward to a constructive and fruitful week of discussions.

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