OPEN ENDED WORKING GROUP ON REDUCING SPACE THREATS THROUGH NORMS, RULES AND PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOURS

AGENDA ITEM 6c: Topic 6: Norms, rules and principles relating to outer space objects or activities that should enjoy protection

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

Clive Hughes, Head of Space Security and Advanced Threats, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Geneva, 1 February 2023

Mr Chair,

A small number of States possess space systems upon which the whole world depends.

In particular, Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) such as the Global Positioning System (GPS) and BEIDOU provide vital position, navigation and timing signals that enable a vast array of social and economic activity in most countries.

States should avoid jamming or spoofing activities against space systems that generate collateral impacts on civilian activity over large areas, such as disruption of air traffic or emergency responders.

Even if these are temporary effects, the significant risks to life and safety demand that countries with jamming/spoofing capabilities act with self-restraint.

Causing irreversible or permanent damage to Global Navigation Satellite Systems is likely to have profound and prolonged effects on the lives of citizens and the economic wellbeing of countries. It therefore risks retaliation and escalation.

States should therefore commit not to cause the permanent loss of command and control of other countries’ satellites.

Mr Chair,

A small number of States possess space systems of the highest strategic importance.

Such systems include satellites and related ground components used for Ballistic Missile Early Warning (BMEW), Nuclear Command, Control and Communication (NC3) and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR).
These space capabilities are vital for detecting activities that might suggest the preparation of hostilities, for example, the build-up of forces, posture changes and moves to heightened readiness. They are also necessary for identifying the launch of ballistic missiles.

The effective operation of such space systems is vital for preventing miscalculation and misperception.

Interference, accidental or deliberate, with space systems involved in a State’s nuclear deterrence architecture could trigger escalation, without effective crisis management and prevention tools in place.

It is vital that nuclear states maintain strong national measures to prevent unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons. Additionally, they should take measures to avoid the inadvertent compromise of critical space components that underpin the operation of nuclear systems.

The UK reiterates its commitment to the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races.

This concludes our remarks on topic 6.

Thank you Mr Chair.