Statement on Outer Space by H.E. Ambassador CHENG Jingye
Head of Chinese Delegation at the Thematic Debate
of the First Committee of the 61st Session
of the United Nations General Assembly

(New York, October 2006)

Madam Chairperson,

Next year marks the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the *Outer Space Treaty (OST)*. The Treaty, as the first important step taken by the international community in safeguarding the security of outer space, has played a significant role in ensuring the peaceful uses of outer space in past decades. Given the swift development of outer space science and technology, the international community is faced with the pressing task of strengthening the effectiveness and the universality of the OST so as to better preserve the sustainable peace and security of outer space. This is an issue which we need to ponder, explore and address through appropriate and proactive measures.

Madam Chairperson,
Over the past five decades, mankind has come a long way in the exploration and utilization of outer space, and the significant achievement thus made has helped to advance the evolution of human civilization. Today, like the land, the ocean and the sky, outer space has become an integral part of our life on which we increasingly depend.

The 21st century will witness a growing number of countries taking part in and benefiting from the exploration and utilization of outer space. More than ever the sustainable peace of outer space is closely linked with each and every country’s security, development and prosperity. As the Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao pointed out on the occasion of the 36th Scientific Assembly of the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR), outer space is the common wealth of mankind; the exploration and peaceful utilization
and exploitation of outer space is the common right of all peoples; and maintaining a peaceful and clean outer space is the common obligation of mankind. The UNGA resolution on outer space, annually adopted by an overwhelming majority, explicitly reflects this common aspiration and determination of the peoples of the world.

What is worrisome, however, is that since man began the exploitation of outer space, the spectre of an arms race in and the weaponization of outer space has been haunting the international community. With the continuous development of space science and technology, this danger looms larger with each passing day.

A world free from outer space weapons is no less important than a world free from WMD. Historical experience has repeatedly shown that prevention is more effective and less costly than remedy. We have already witnessed the many difficulties on the thorny path of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Mankind must not be allowed to sink in the quagmire of the weaponization of outer space as a result of our inaction now.

Madam Chairperson,
To conclude a new international legal instrument to close the loopholes of the existing legal framework related to outer space is the only effective way of coping with the challenge of the weaponization of outer space. The Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva had set up an ad hoc committee on outer space for ten consecutive years and accumulated rich experience in properly dealing with the issue of outer space.

We note with satisfaction that the CD conducted important and meaningful structured and focused debate on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) this year. A majority of member states of the Conference expressed, during the debate, their concerns about the tendency of the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space and voiced their support for the CD to engage in substantive work on PAROS.
Many countries brought their experts to the discussions and countries like China, the Russian Federation and Canada submitted a series of working documents on this issue. During the debate, in-depth and extensive exchange of views, from political, legal, technological and financial angles, on issues concerning the future legal instrument such as definitions, scope, verification, confidence-building measures and security of real assets in outer space were conducted among all parties. The debate achieved fruitful results and showed that the international community’s awareness of the importance of prevention of the weaponization of outer space is increasing, and the common ground on how to address this problem effectively is expanding.

It is also noteworthy that, in March this year, China, the Russian Federation, Canada and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) as well as Simons Foundation of Canada once again co-sponsored an international conference on outer space. In this conference, the theme of which is “building the architecture for sustainable space security”, participants carried out heated and frank discussions on topics such as threats to the peaceful uses of outer space, approaches to ensure space security, etc.. Many constructive proposals and ideas were put forward.

Madam Chairperson,
China maintains that the CD should re-establish an ad hoc committee on PAROS at an early date so that substantive work can be conducted on the issue of prevention of the weaponization of outer space. It would be the best way to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the OST. We are looking forward to the early achievement of this goal.

China is ready to join hands with all states to continue our unremitting efforts to that end.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.