Mr Chairman,

Australia shares with other Member States an enduring interest in a rules-based approach to the use of space which promotes peaceful, safe and responsible activities, and which protects access to space for future generations.

The development of practical and achievable international norms which protect the world’s continuing ability to undertake peaceful space activities safely is not a simple matter. The space arms control treaty proposal tabled in the Conference on Disarmament, for example, illustrates this point. The approach taken in the draft highlights the formidable technical challenges relating to the definition of a space weapon, the difficulties with agreeing the scope of a treaty, and the need for any stipulated action to be accompanied by an effective verification mechanism.

Australia believes at this time that there is genuine merit in focusing on the development of effective transparency and confidence-building measures. Australia considers that such a focus could provide the necessary foundation for the future development of new international space norms.

For this reason, Australia places great importance on the current work of the Group of Government Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, which was established in response to UN General Assembly resolution 65/68 and which is working under the effective leadership of Mr Victor Vasiliev of Russia. Although not a member of this GGE, Australia is contributing to the work of the GGE through a substantive submission on the application of the broad range of existing international law to the space domain.

Understanding how existing international law already regulates behaviour in space will provide an important basis for future work. Greater clarity on the interpretation of international law with respect to space security issues beyond that set out in the five multilateral space treaties would, we believe, be a useful basis on which to develop new TCBMs.

Mr Chairman,
Australia accords high priority to international action to prevent the proliferation of long-lived orbital space debris. We see an urgent need to work towards the development of international norms to prevent the deliberate or accidental creation of such debris.

In particular, Australia sees the development and testing in space of kinetic anti-satellite weapons as a pressing space security challenge, given their demonstrated and continuing capacity to cause significant and cascading growth in long-lived orbital space debris. Member States share a common practical interest in addressing these issues.

For this reason, Australia has declared its support for the concept of an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, along the lines proposed by the European Union, building on existing TCBMs to address these concerns. Australia has purposefully engaged in deliberations to develop this Code, and encourages other States to engage constructively in this work.

Australia believes that the Code can make an important contribution to addressing the pressing issue of space debris. We should work towards this goal with the sense of urgency that the space debris challenge warrants. Australia recognises that such a Code will not be a “silver bullet” to solve all issues relating to space security, but it would be a valuable, practical and achievable step forward.

Mr Chairman,

The increasing dependency of all nations on space-enabled services, along with the rapid growth in the number of countries operating satellites, mean that the number of countries with direct interest in the security of space has expanded enormously. This is particularly true in our Asia-Pacific region. Asia-Pacific countries have an interest in participating effectively in international discourse on space security.

For this reason, Australia, together with Vietnam, is holding a Space Security Workshop under the auspices of the ASEAN Regional Forum, at Hoi An in Vietnam, on 6 and 7 December this year. The ARF brings together 27 members that collectively represent over ninety per cent of satellite payloads currently in space, from a region that increasingly relies on space, and that uses space-enabled systems to make a strong contribution to world economic growth. This Workshop will make a practical contribution to strengthening the work of the international community to meet space security challenges.