STATEMENT

By Ambassador Victor Vasiliev
Chairman, Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities (2012-2013).
At the Joint ad hoc meeting of the First and the Fourth Committees of the 70-th session of the UN General Assembly
October 22, 2015

Dear Presidents of the First and the Fourth Committees,
Dear Mr. Under-Secretary General,
Dear Ms. Director, Office of Outer Space Affairs,
Dear Delegates, Colleagues.

When the GGE on TCBMs got together for the first meeting in July 2012, we had almost the same feelings as you today. The GGE Experts came with different expertise – diplomatic, military, scientific, legal – representing countries with contrasting space interests and experience. Some of us, like myself, were only familiar with such abbreviations as CD, UNDC, First Committee and space security was mainly associated with arms control issues. Others were confident that UNCOPUOS, its subcommittees and the Fourth Committee were the center of the universe. It took us only a couple of meetings to arrive at the first conclusion: ultimate goal of space security and sustainability could only be achieved through synergy and interaction between actors. Latter, this conclusion was transformed into the recommendation by the GGE to consider to hold a Joint meeting of the First and the Fourth Committees and I am very glad that it was unanimously supported.

The GGE did not have a goal to invent something or come up with a new initiative. Our prime task was to take stock of the existing instruments and practices, identify “lacunas” and propose ways to enhance space security and sustainability.

Indeed, a lot is in place already. The Group acknowledged five major international instruments and treaties on outer space containing several TCBMs: Outer Space Treaty of 1967, Rescue Agreement of 1968, Liability Convention of 1972, Registration convention of 1976 and Moon Treaty of 1984. There are several bilateral agreements among space faring nations on exchanges of information. Organizations like ITU, WMO maintain procedures to regulate their spectrum of space assets.
Group also noted the work that was underway on several tracks. This includes Vienna based UN COPUOS Working Group on the Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, the EU-led work to promote an international code of conduct, the debates at UNGA First and Fourth Committees. We also have initiatives by some States or group of States, for example, to undertake not to be the first to deploy weapons in space. The Conference on Disarmament has an agenda item “Prevention of an arms race in outer space” and the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Treat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects was introduced at this forum.

As an outcome of three sessions discussions and extensive inter session work the GGE came up with the Report that contained both the overview of the general characteristics and basic principles of outer space TCBMs as well as the series of measures to enhance them (A/68/189 of 29 July 2013). Let me remind of the basics.

- The GGE identified categories of and criteria for TCBMs.
- The Group agreed that the proposed measures should be of voluntary, non-legally binding character without prejudice to the implementation of those measures that are part of existing obligations by Member States parties to such arrangements.
- TCBMs can not serve as the substitution to the legally binding arrangement and States shall consider their accession to all relevant arrangements.

The Report contained specific recommendations to enhance the transparency of outer space activities. These include:

- Information exchange on space policies, the principles and goals of a State’s outer space policy, on major military outer space expenditures and other national security space activities.
- Information exchange and notifications such as on orbital parameters of outer space objects and potential orbital conjunctions, on forecast natural hazards in outer space and spacecraft launches.
- Risk reduction notifications, including on scheduled manoeuvres, uncontrolled high-risk re-entry events, other emergency situations and of intentional orbital break-ups.
The GGE also acknowledged that being ambitious we must be realistic. With this in mind we tried to put forward proposals that were practical, implementable, did not undermine sovereign rights or security of States. From that prospective I shall once again stress that the measures proposed in the Report are of voluntary nature, or are part of existing instruments.

Of course, the main question after all Studies and GGEs – what’s next? When our Group was working on the recommendations we also had doubts whether the Report would serve its purpose or would be just another file in the archive?

The latest developments to promote space security and sustainability and, of course, holding of Today’s meeting proves that we were on the right track. I believe this meeting will ad to the synergy between different UN bodies dealing with space security and bring more understanding what is going in various bodies in Geneva, Vienna and New York and how they can compliment each others work.

Another important task is to make all arrangements effecting space security and sustainability universal and insure their strict implementation. Here, I should ad to the above mentioned five major international instruments Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, The Hague Code of Conduct, as well as the Convention of the International Telecommunication Union and its Radio Regulations and the Convention of the World Meteorological Organization. The General Assembly shall call upon States that have not yet become members to the international treaties governing the use of outer space to consider ratifying or acceding to those treaties and arrangements.

In preparation of the Report the GGE and its Chair cooperated with other international Organizations and bodies including UN COPUOS, ITU, WMO. We received responses and proposals from more then 50 countries, pursuant respective resolutions of the First Committee on transparency and confidence-building measures, as well as directly to the GGE. We had close cooperation with the NGOs. I also briefed the UNIDIR Space Conference as well as the First Committee, the CD and UN COPUOS on the deliberations at the GGE. All inputs were considered by the Group. But finally, the Report is the “product” of 15 Experts representing Brazil, Chile, China, France, Italy, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Romania, South
Africa, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States and Russia. Though it was adopted and latter approved by UNGA resolution 68/50 by consensus – the first consensus reached on this issue in decades- I share the view that further work on TCBMs in Outer Space shall continue within universal or established UN bodies. This apply, inter alia, to the draft International Code of Conduct which has same “roots” as the TCBMs. In order to progress it is important to find an appropriate procedure and platform to advance ICC that was demonstrated at the latest meeting in New York.

The introduction at the Conference on Disarmament in 2014 of the updated version of the draft PPWT indicates that we are also moving towards legally binding treaty banning weapons in space. The CD may also consider TSBMs in outer space within its agenda item “Prevention of an arms race in outer space” and as a compliment to PPWT. Let us make it possible that this body agree on its Program of work and start substantive work.

In anticipation of the legally binding treaty banning placement of weapons in space and the use of force against outer space objects the undertaking by some countries and regional organizations not to be the first to place weapons in space is of great importance and I strongly encourage to broaden support to this initiative.

I shall not “eat the bread” of Dr. Peter Martinez who will address us via video link and limit my remarks by welcoming the important work that is underway in UN COPUOS and its subcommittees on space sustainability.

In conclusion, please allow me a comparison. I would compare the task of achieving space security and sustainability with a puzzle. The are many fragments of the puzzle – big and small – but without a single element the picture is incomplete or bleak. TSBMs may not necessarily be a fragment of the puzzle. Confidence is rather a background for the whole picture. I wish this meeting will bring us closer to the assembly point of the Puzzle called “Space security and sustainability”.

Thank you.