Statement by Ambassador Farukh Amil, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva

At the Thematic Debate on Outer Space (disarmament aspects)
(17 October 2017)
Mr. Chairman,

Outer space is the common heritage of all humankind. It is in our collective interest to explore and use outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes. Outer space is being used by an increasing number of states both for civilian and military purposes. While our reliance and dependence on outer space applications is increasing, the potential and the risk of its weaponization is also on the rise. There is an urgent need to address this issue in order to prevent outer space from emerging as the new realm of conflict and arms race.

The dominance currently enjoyed by certain countries in outer space owing to their current technological prowess cannot last forever. Other countries are catching up fast. And this time, the developing countries will neither carry the burden of non-proliferation, nor will they accept any discriminatory restrictions which hamper their peaceful pursuits in outer space.

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 recognized that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all humanity, that is, our common heritage. The treaty prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons and other WMDs in outer space, but is silent on the placement of other types of weapons including conventional weapons in outer space.

Moreover, the development and deployment of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) systems and their integration into space assets has added another dangerous dimension. We share the concern expressed by NAM over the negative implications of ABM systems and other advanced military technologies capable of being deployed in outer space. They will have wide-ranging implications for regional as well as international security. The effects of the introduction of such systems can be particularly destabilizing for regions like South Asia. These concerns need to be addressed in a treaty on PAROS.

Mr. Chairman,

The issue of PAROS has been on the CD’s agenda for three and a half decades now. In our view, it is ripe for the commencement of negotiations on a legally binding treaty. The draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, commonly known as PPWT, tabled jointly by the Russian Federation and China in 2008, and updated in 2014, provides a useful basis for the commencement of negotiations in the CD. The start of substantive work on PAROS in the CD would contribute to international and regional peace and security as well as to the strengthening of the global non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. It would also end the deadlock in the CD, which is in part due to the refusal of some states to commence negotiations on PAROS. And if certain states continue to oppose such negotiations, then they should acknowledge their responsibility in perpetuating the CD’s deadlock.
Mr. Chairman,

The latest General Assembly resolution on PAROS, co-sponsored by Pakistan, was adopted with an overwhelming majority of states in favour, none against, and only 4 abstentions. It called on the CD to establish a working group under its agenda item on PAROS, which we fully support.

The last session of the General Assembly also adopted another important resolution, co-sponsored by Pakistan since it was first introduced in 2013, titled “No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space”. We welcome the laudable and pioneering move by the Russian Federation to announce the political commitment that it would not be the first to place weapons in outer space, and appreciate similar announcements by other states.

Mr. Chairman,

We take note of the consensus report and recommendations of the 2013 GGE on Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (TCBMs) in Outer Space. TCBMs should be aimed at increasing the security, safety and sustainability of outer space. We particularly welcome the GGE’s recommendation to further develop international cooperation between space-faring and non-space-faring nations in the peaceful uses of outer space for the benefit of all States.

TCBMs and non-legally binding Codes of Conduct are valuable for promoting trust and confidence among states. However, these voluntary measures cannot substitute for legally binding treaty based obligations. There are clear gaps in the international legal regime governing the use of outer space with grave security implications. These gaps must be plugged by concluding a treaty on PAROS in the CD. All multilateral efforts to develop non-legally binding Codes of Conduct, etc. should be pursued in an inclusive, universal and participatory manner within the UN system, taking into account the interests of all states.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan is party to all of the five core multilateral treaties governing the peaceful uses of outer space. Pakistan is a member of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. This Committee has an important role in maximizing the benefits of space capabilities in the service of humanity, particularly in the fields of environment, health and disaster mitigation.

Pakistan considered the joint ad hoc meeting of the First and Fourth Committees on outer space issues, held in October 2015, to be a positive initiative. In the same vein, we welcome the joint panel discussion of the First and Fourth Committees on possible challenges to space security and sustainability, held on 12 October this year.

I thank you.