Mr. Chairman,

1. I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and my own country, Malaysia.

2. The current global disarmament discourse encompasses efforts to maintain outer space as a domain of peace and security. Taking cognizance of inter-state tensions and emerging threats to the international rules-based order, ASEAN reaffirms the imperative of preventing an arms race in outer space. ASEAN welcomes the establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on this subject, of which one ASEAN Member State, Malaysia, is presently a member, and the commencement of the work of the GGE.
3. ASEAN reaffirms the importance of the GGE's mandate, as set out in GA Resolution 72/250, in formulating recommendations on substantial elements of an international legally binding instrument on preventing an arms race in outer space. This includes, inter alia, the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space. We hope that the GGE's efforts will be transparent and inclusive, and look forward to the two-day open-ended intersessional informal consultative meeting in New York in 2019. We also look forward to engaging the GGE in dialogue on issues such as how principles of international law, including those drawn from the UN Charter, could apply to the conduct of States in outer space. Such nuanced questions are sure to assume increasing practical relevance, given the rapid development and deployment of new space technologies.

4. In line with its abiding faith in multilateral cooperation, ASEAN remains committed to advancing the work of relevant bodies such as the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). As it is incumbent upon all States to ensure that the use and exploration of outer space are exclusively peaceful, the General Assembly also plays a vital role in fostering continued dialogue on current issues and challenges in this field. In this connection, we should consider holding meetings on ad hoc basis, such as those held within the First and Fourth Committees during the 70th Session of the UNGA, to maintain the momentum achieved to date. Indeed, UN-led mechanisms constitute the most suitable avenue for deliberation on space-related challenges. We need to maintain broad support for the conduct of substantive discussions thereunder, to prevent the institutional deadlock
which has afflicted certain multilateral platforms in the disarmament context.

5. As recognized by the international community through General Assembly resolution 72/56, confidence-building measures play a critical role in preventing an arms race in outer space. On this note, ASEAN will continue to support initiatives of this nature, through platforms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which currently comprises 27 Participants from across the Asia-Pacific region. To date, three ARF Space Security workshops have been convened, and we will examine the possibility of organizing similar initiatives in future.

6. These programmes present opportunities to bring together policymakers and experts from among the official representatives, security and space communities, to enable better understanding of each other's perspectives and priorities with regard to activities in outer space. Cultivating such institutional links is crucial in preventing misperceptions and conflict, particularly in an era of instantaneous dissemination of information. Official engagement should be complemented by initiatives involving academics, non-governmental organizations and civil society, which will enrich our understanding of challenges and development of solutions. Reaching out to private sector entities is also crucial, in view of these actors' current and potential activities in outer space.

Mr. Chairman,
7. The world has witnessed much change since the advent of the 'Space Age' some six decades ago. The international community has benefited from enhancements in the telecommunications and financial sectors which have been made possible by space-based technology. Moving forward, activities in outer space should not remain the exclusive preserve of a small group of States. ASEAN encourages the strengthening of capacity-building programmes, with a particular emphasis on developing countries, to ensure that outer space is, both in principle and in practice, a truly global commons which all States can avail themselves of.

8. Undoubtedly, with increased access to outer space come greater responsibilities incumbent upon the entire UN membership. This further underscores the need for shared understanding and acceptance of norms developed through multilateral engagement. Among others, we will collectively need to grapple with the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of our use and exploration of outer space. In this regard, ASEAN calls for continued action in mitigating the effects of space debris through relevant multilateral fora.

9. As with other rapidly evolving fields, there will be considerable challenges in reaching convergence vis-à-vis interests and perspectives concerning disarmament in outer space. As we navigate the complexities at hand, ASEAN stands ready to engage with all parties in moving the agenda forward.

Thank you.