It is a challenging time to recognize progress in disarmament, or even active venues where progress might be achieved. Publications and articles addressing disarmament, be it on offensive or defensive missile systems, nuclear warheads, or advances being made in technologies affecting the outer space environment, point to little activity in negotiating forums, while there are substantial programs for building replacement systems for nuclear weapons, and for defensive and offensive technologies that might be deployed or used in outer space.

The 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, which entered into force only a decade after the first satellites were launched into orbit around the Earth, is the bedrock agreement governing this vast environment, extending as it does trillions of kilometers in every direction. The Treaty seeks, as its Article I makes clear, to ensure that the “exploration and use of outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and shall be the province of all mankind.” In Article IV, the orbiting, or the placement anywhere in outer space, of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction is prohibited. This Article, thankfully, has stood the test of time, although three decades ago interest was voiced in placing in outer space systems designed to counter ballistic missile attacks, one of which was envisioned to use a nuclear explosive to generate a laser beam to destroy a ballistic weapon.

Today the interest in deploying systems in outer space designed to counter attacks using ballistic missiles, or perhaps other delivery technologies, remains active. It is coincident with interest in deploying systems designed to attack and destroy satellites. The overlapping of such technologies has been evident for many years. It points to the importance, first, of seeking ways to ensure that the present competition in nuclear weapons is brought to a
global halt and, second, of initiating a global process aimed at the elimination of such weapons.

In this regard, the use of outer space for monitoring activities on Earth has become immensely important. In an earlier time, the initial arms control agreements, including the Strategic Arms Limitation agreements between the USSR and the USA, depended explicitly on the so-called "national technical means" of verification. Today, the importance of such means is widely recognized as critical to the monitoring and verification of both nuclear arms reduction and elimination agreements, as well as multilateral undertakings like the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Accordingly, the Holy See welcomes the start earlier this year of work in the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) for outer space, an initiative that my Delegation endorsed at this Committee last year. TCBMs are not a substitute for further legally binding undertakings governing activities in outer space that are designed to strengthen global stability and peace, but they can provide considerable support to that objective. We are looking forward to the development and recommendation for adoption of substantive TCBMs for outer space as a result of the work in the UNDC.

Mr. Chair,

In considering transparency in activities oriented toward military aspects of security, in research and in the development of technologies, it is important that other States do not feel compelled to respond with competitive activities. With such transparency, States would have confidence that no one was progressing to the fielding of weapons systems, in other words engaging in a sort of "arms race." Such transparency can be subject to reciprocal monitoring using national and international technical means. In the 1970s, the United Nations discussed the possibility of establishing an International Satellite Monitoring Agency (ISMA). It is possible to return to this proposal, and consider whether the time has come to bring such an agency into being, in order to provide information, on an open basis, regarding activities related to the launching of objects into space or on directing energy at satellites and other objects in space. States can also agree to make known their launching sites for sending objects into outer space, or for directing energy at objects, or locations, in outer space. That is, they can agree to such transparency in reporting on their activities directed at, or being carried out in, outer space.

In order to build confidence among States as to the peaceful nature of activities in outer space, we can think about the presence of observers of other nationalities, for example officials of an International Satellite Monitoring Agency (ISMA) or a related United Nations body, at their launch facilities. States can announce the payloads that their launchers are carrying and those payloads can be inspected by the observers prior to their launch.
Attention should be given also to the activities in the fields of ballistic missiles and ballistic missile defense. States should agree to increase confidence by not testing such ballistic-missile-related systems in an anti-satellite mode. An agreement stipulating that testing will not be carried out against objects in space, with either kinetic or non-kinetic means, would be another important confidence-building measure.

States launching objects into space with the objective of approaching other satellites or space vehicles, either their own or others, should agree to prior notice of such actions. Consideration should be given to establishing "keep-out" zones around space objects that would only be entered with the prior assent of the State or other institution to which the object belongs.

Mr. Chair,

An arms race can be prevented, above all, by carrying out as many activities in outer space as possible on a multilateral basis. The great success of the International Space Station is a case in point. Multilateral involvement points to transparency, building confidence that the activities are not aimed at weaponizing the outer space environment.

In due course, some or all of these TCBMs can be converted into legally binding undertakings, further adding to stability and peace in outer space, if not also down below. The outer space environment could thus remain one where the objective of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control is more nearly satisfied.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.