Statement by Mr. Seyed Mohammad Ali Robatjazi, Director, Office for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran Before the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly On Outer Space (Disarmament Aspects) New York, 24 October 2018

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In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the NAM statement delivered by Indonesia.

According to international space law, outer space is the common heritage and province of all mankind, and all States have freedom and equality to access outer space for peaceful purposes.

With this right comes an obligation that the use of outer space by one country should not degrade the space environment for future users, and the commitment that the exploration and use of outer space shall be for the benefit of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development. However, the militarization and weaponization of outer space undermines these global rules and commitments.

To ensure a peaceful outer space environment, prevention of its weaponization and an arms race therein is an essential and urgent priority.

The rapid advances in space science and technology, the existing shortcomings in international space law, coupled with the irresponsible actions and policies of certain States, have made the danger of the weaponization of outer space more imminent than ever. As a result, the occurrence of an arms race in outer space is a real possibility today.

We are very concerned about the U.S. space policies and plans which threaten the sustainability of a peaceful space environment and risk triggering a destructive arms competition in outer space. The U.S. clearly has the intention to dominate space for national military advantage and to control the access of all other countries to outer space. This is a serious threat for international security. The U.S. is spending tens of billions of dollars each year to acquire advanced offensive space capabilities, such as developing space-based missile defense interceptors and space-based global strike weapons.

In 2002, the U.S., through its unilateral withdrawal from the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM), removed the greatest barrier to testing and deploying space-based weapons, which was a treaty limitation. The ABM treaty had explicitly outlawed deployment of space-based weapon systems or testing the components of such a system.
On 21 February 2008, the U.S. introduced anti-satellite weapons and used a modified sea-based theater missile defense interceptor to destroy a satellite under unjustifiable and unverifiable claims. It has recently announced its decision to create a space force within its military forces and has officially stated that space is a war-fighting domain.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has become the principal obstacle to the development of explicit international legally binding rules prohibiting a deliberate attack on space objects. It has also blocked any attempt in the CD to start negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space, standing alone against the rest of the world in doing so.

These are some examples of the United States' irresponsible space policy and behavior which violate the basic principles of the Outer Space Treaty. It is necessary to prevent such a rogue State, which has an addiction to the violation of international law, from putting into action its intention to turn the peaceful space environment into a battlefield and a conflict zone.

The U.S. cannot and will not be able to dominate space. However, its destabilizing action creates insecurity in outer space. The international community should not let it decide who should use outer space.

Additional international legal provisions are needed to prohibit the weaponization of outer space in all its aspects, protect satellites and prevent deployment of space weapons. Iran strongly supports the efforts and proposals within the CD for the prevention of the weaponization of outer space.

Iran notes the complementary role of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities and their contribution to efforts on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. However, given their intrinsic limitations, such measures cannot replace the negotiation of a universal legally binding treaty to prevent an arms race in outer space.

Iran underlines the right of all States to peaceful applications of space technologies, which are indispensable tools for sustainable development. Access to outer space through space science, techniques, and technologies should be available to all countries.

We reject any attempt aimed at manipulating space technology into a monopoly of a few countries or imposing any restriction to the transfer of space-related science, know-how, technology and services to developing countries.

In conclusion, I wish to stress that Iran stands ready to support all genuine efforts aimed at ensuring that this realm will always remain exclusively for peaceful uses.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.