STATEMENT

By Mr. Andrey Belousov,
Deputy Head of the Russian Delegation
in the First Committee
of the 73rd Session of the UNGA
on «Outer Space» Cluster

New York, 24 October, 2018
Mr. Chairperson,

Weaponization of outer space would have a significant destabilizing effect on international peace and security. For this reason preventing an arms race in outer space (PAROS) and keeping it free of weapons of any kind remains one of Russia’s foreign policy priorities.

We approach this task and the issue of security of space activities in general with utmost responsibility. This is demonstrated at various dedicated multilateral fora, above all, at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and within the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. However many things we have to deal with as part of our work do not appear promising.

The CD remains deadlocked for already two decades. As a result we fail to launch the negotiation process on PAROS, specifically, on the draft treaty on the prevention of placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects (PPWT), proposed by the Russian Federation jointly with the People’s Republic of China.

This year in Vienna negotiators failed to reach agreement on key aspects of the safety of space operations.

Still, there are positive signs as well. A good example here is the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on further practical measures on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which has been established this year. The first GGE session held in August in Geneva gives hope that governmental experts will be in a position to fulfill their mandate, which is to prepare recommendations on the elements of a multilateral legally binding instrument on PAROS, including preventing the placement of weapons in outer space.
Besides, consensus seems to have been established within the international community with regard to the development of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities (TCBMs) in accordance with the recommendations of the appropriate UN GGE. Every state seems to support the idea, at least verbally. Another story is that States, as it turns out, have different views regarding the way of effectively realizing the potential of such measures. The work over the set of guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities presented a good opportunity to reach this goal. However, it turned out to be impossible to elaborate the TCBMs issue in the context of this document to the full extent.

The trend, characteristic of the United States, to further toughen its national regulation of military aspects of space activities is a contrast to this background, which we may, with some reservations, characterize as positive. Here I refer to such things as establishing – way beyond any reasonable measure of sufficiency – of self-defense in outer space concept that has nothing in common with the criteria characterizing Article 51 of the UN Charter. Such radical concept of self-defense is complemented by a rigid regulation in the U.S. of operational activities in outer space in general. It should be also noted that the U.S., in particular recently, is methodically imposing on the international community the view that outer space has become a contested environment. It would be helpful to know what developments prompt to make such conclusion. Maybe we are just being prepared to accept that outer space is to become an arena for confrontation?

I would like to draw attention to the fact that the U.S. operational documents regulating space operations and special military directives in this regard have been for a long time providing for the use of preemptive and anticipatory measures in outer space on the basis of subjective assessments. This is what makes such approach dangerous in a very fundamental way.

It remains to be seen how such countries as, for example Russia and China, should plan their space activities if the U.S. national documents provide for the application of self-defense in response to a broad range of motives – starting from
the defense of the U.S nation, its forces, national commercial assets, up to that of persons and their property, and, in general, in case of “infringements on United States rights”.

Given the abovementioned, it is not surprising that the U.S. National Space Strategy announced this March characterizes outer space as “a warfighting domain”. Continuing the policy towards ensuring the U.S. “space dominance” does not contribute to a constructive dialogue on strategic stability at all.

Equally disturbing is the financial support of the relevant US projects. For example, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019” directly allocates significant funds from the U.S. budget to develop a space-based ballistic missile intercept segment. It even determines a specific timeframe when weapons are to be placed in outer space – by 2030. Exactly by that time the development of the appropriate interceptors is to be finalized.

If this trend continues, the work at all the negotiation tracks pertaining to outer space will end up with no results and return to zero level. It will not become possible to enhance safety and security in outer space. Besides, it will hardly be possible in these circumstances to ensure the observance of the principle of direct interrelationship between strategic offensive and strategic defensive arms. This principle, being fundamental for the entire arms control system, is reflected in the 2010 START Treaty.

The Russian Federation together with the like-minded States works hard in order to evade such scenario. For the current UNGA session we have prepared a number of constructive initiatives aimed at addressing the task of PAROS.

First of all, it regards the appropriate UN GGE on PAROS that has proceeded to its activity this August. We appreciate that the Group’s work was joined by the representatives of the States that had opposed our resolution. We consider it as evidence of the States’ readiness to share responsibility for keeping outer space free of weapons. Given that the GGE will continue its work next year we propose to adopt at this UNGA session a draft procedural decision with a view of keeping the appropriate item on the UNGA agenda.
At the current First committee we have also tabled a draft resolution “No first placement of weapons in outer space” (NFP). The resolution has already established itself within the UN as a traditional document. It does not run counter to national interests of States. The document is meant to promote mobilization of the international community in support of the multilateral initiative/political obligation not to be the first to place weapons in outer space, put forward by Russia back in 2004. Last year, two more states joined it – Suriname and Guatemala. Thus, the total number of the NFP full-scale participants reached 19.

Finally, we are presenting another traditional draft resolution “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities” that submitted this year was on behalf of two initial co-authors – Russia and China. Importantly, the work on TCBMs is being carried out at various fora. This year, the first discussions on the subject took place within the UN Disarmament Commission. We hope that at the current session the draft resolution on space TCBMs will be approved by consensus.

At the current First Committee we expect our three resolutions be approved by consensus.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.