Chair

Space is an increasingly contested, congested, and competitive environment. This often repeated phrase has become a cliché because of its essential truth. The barriers to accessing space are tumbling and space technology has become more sophisticated, cheaper to build, easier to launch and to maintain.

At the same time, space is not quarantined from the risks associated with increased global strategic competition. The global economy, civilian population and most militaries are dependent on space systems. Satellite remote sensing, communications, and navigation systems enable real-time access to information necessary to connect people, operate a
global economy, respond to natural disasters, and support military operations.

Australia relies heavily on these space systems, including for defence operations and capability. But these space-based capabilities are vulnerable and space is increasingly seen as an important component of strategic competition and military advantage.

Many in this room have questioned if current international frameworks are adequate to limit the risk of conflict in space. We do not believe that the fundamental issue is the adequacy of the frameworks. International law, including the provisions of the UN Charter, applies to the activities of states in outer space.

What matters most is responsible behaviour and confidence. So, we need to give greater consideration to how we build international norms, transparency and cooperation in promoting responsible behaviour in space. In this regard, Australia welcomes the adoption of the 21 Long-term Sustainability Guidelines by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and calls on all countries to endeavour to implement them fully. To this end, Australia will be an active participant in the Working Group that will examine the issue of
implementation as well as consideration of any further guidelines.

Australia was also pleased to send an expert to participate in the Group of Governmental Experts on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The experts engaged constructively and with genuine intent to deliver on the mandate they had been given, but ultimately, consensus was unable to be achieved. There were important divergences that could not be resolved. For example, on the scope of potential legally binding obligations, verification issues, the role of transparency and confidence building measures and the conditions required for negotiation of a potentially legally binding instrument. It is with some disappointment, then, that we witnessed the circulation of the non-consensus report after the meeting.
To Australia, the Group of Governmental Experts outcome underscored the challenges around a prohibitions-based approach. We continue to believe that a focus on behaviour would be more effective. We could take concrete positive actions, such as development of a norm against deliberately generating space debris. In the first instance, transparency and confidence building measures will help to establish greater levels of trust and a more immediate approach to improving space security.

Chair

Australia will continue to work with all countries to promote the peaceful uses of outer space, but recognises that there is a growing threat to the space assets on which we all rely. For this reason, we continue to seek international cooperation to help build transparency and confidence between nations, and encourage both stability and responsible behaviour in space.